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*Modern Detective
Stories*

by


A. CONAN DOYLE

R. AUSTIN FREEMAN

A. E. W. MASON

BARONESS ORCZY

EDGAR WALLACE



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BARONESS ORZCY, and EDGAR WALLACE.





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MODERN DETECTIVE STORIES

I

THE SPECKLED BAND

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

IN glancing over my notes of the seventy odd cases in which I have during the last eight years studied the methods of my friend Sherlock Holmes, I find many tragic, some comic, a large number merely strange, but none commonplace; for, working as he did rather for the love of his art than for the acquirement of wealth, he refused to associate himself with any investigation which did not tend towards the unusual, and even the fantastic. Of all these varied cases, however, I cannot recall any which presented more singular features than that which was associated with the well-known Surrey family of the Roylotts of Stoke Moran. The events in question occurred in the early days of my association with Holmes, when we were sharing rooms as bachelors in Baker-street. It is possible that I might have placed them upon record before, but a promise of secrecy was made at the time, from which I have only been freed during the last month by the untimely death of the lady to whom the pledge was given. It is perhaps as well that the facts should now come to light, for I have reasons to know there are widespread rumours as to the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott which tend to make the matter even more terrible than the truth.

It was early in April, in the year '83, that I woke one morning to find Sherlock Holmes standing, fully dressed, by the side of my bed. He was a late riser as a rule, and, as the clock on the mantelpiece showed me that it was only a quarter past seven, I blinked at him in some surprise, and perhaps just a little resentment, for I was myself regular in my habits.

"Very sorry to knock you up, Watson," said he, "but it's the common lot this morning. Mrs. Hudson has been knocked up, she retorted upon me, and I on you."

"What is it then? A fire?"

"No, a client. It seems that a young lady has arrived in a considerable state of excitement, who insists upon seeing me. She is waiting now in the sitting-room. Now, when young ladies wander about the Metropolis at this hour of the morning, and knock sleepy people up out of their beds, I presume that it is something very pressing which they have to communicate. Should it prove to be an interesting case, you would, I am sure, wish to follow it from the outset. I thought at any rate that I should call you, and give you the chance."

"My dear fellow, I would not miss it for anything."

I had no keener pleasure than in following Holmes in his professional investigations, and in admiring the rapid deductions, as swift as intuitions, and yet always founded on a logical basis, with which he unravelled the problems which were submitted to him. I rapidly threw on my clothes, and was ready in a few minutes to accompany my friend down to the sitting-room. A lady dressed in black and heavily veiled, who had been sitting in the window, rose as we entered.

"Good morning, madam," said Holmes cheerily. "My name is Sherlock Holmes. This is my intimate friend and associate, Dr. Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself. Ha, I am glad to see that Mrs. Hudson has had the good sense to light the fire. Pray draw up to it, and I shall order you a cup of hot coffee, for I observe that you are shivering."

"It is not cold which makes me shiver," said the woman in a low voice, changing her seat as requested.

"What then?"

"It is fear, Mr. Holmes. It is terror." She raised her veil as she spoke, and we could see that she was indeed in a pitiable state of agitation, her face all drawn and grey, with restless, frightened eyes, like those of some hunted animal. Her features and figure were those of a woman of thirty, but her hair was shot with premature grey, and her expression was weary and haggard. Sherlock Holmes ran her over with one of his quick, all-comprehensive glances. *and this glare*

"You must not fear," said he soothingly, bending forward and patting her forearm. "We shall soon set matters right, I have no doubt. You have come in by train this morning, I see."

"You know me, then?"

"No, but I observe the second half of a return ticket in the palm of your left glove. You must have started early, and yet you had a good drive in a dogcart, along heavy roads, before you reached the station."

The lady gave a violent start, and stared in bewilderment at my companion.

"There is no mystery, my dear madam," said he, smiling. "The left arm of your jacket is spattered with mud in no less than seven places. The marks are

perfectly fresh. There is no vehicle save a dogcart which throws up mud in that way, and then only when you sit on the left-hand side of the driver."

"Whatever your reasons may be, you are perfectly correct," said she. "I started from home before six, reached Leatherhead at twenty past, and came in by the first train to Waterloo. Sir, I can stand this strain no longer, I shall go mad if it continues. I have no one to turn to—none, save only one, who cares for me, and he, poor fellow, can be of little aid. I have heard of you, Mr. Holmes; I have heard of you from Mrs. Farintosh, whom you helped in the hour of her sore need. It was from her that I had your address. Oh, sir, do you not think you could help me too, and at least throw a little light through the dense darkness which surrounds me? At present it is out of my power to reward you for your services, but in a month or two I shall be married, with the control of my own income, and then at least you shall not find me ungrateful."

Holmes turned to his desk, and unlocking it, drew out a small case-book which he consulted.

"Farintosh," said he. "Ah, yes, I recall the case; it was concerned with an opal tiara. I think it was before your time, Watson. I can only say, madam, that I shall be happy to devote the same care to your case as I did to that of your friend. As to reward, my profession is its reward; but you are at liberty to defray whatever expenses I may be put to, at the time which suits you best. And now I beg that you will lay before us everything that may help us in forming an opinion upon the matter."

"Alas!" replied our visitor. "The very horror of my situation lies in the fact that my fears are so vague,

not clear

and my suspicions depend so entirely upon small points, which might seem trivial to another, that even he to whom of all others I have a right to look for help and advice looks upon all that I tell him about it as the fancies of a nervous woman. He does not say so, but I can read it from his soothing answers and averted eyes. But I have heard, Mr. Holmes, that you can see deeply into the manifold wickedness of the human heart. You may advise me how to walk amid the dangers which encompass me."

"I am all attention, madam."

"My name is Helen Stoner, and I am living with my stepfather, who is the last survivor of one of the oldest Saxon families in England, the Roylotts of Stoke Moran, on the western border of Surrey."

Holmes nodded his head. "The name is familiar to me," said he.

"The family was at one time among the richest in England, and the estate extended over the borders into Berkshire in the north, and Hampshire in the west. In the last century, however, four successive heirs were of a dissolute and wasteful disposition, and the family ruin was eventually completed by a gambler, in the days of the Regency. Nothing was left save a few acres of ground and the two-hundred-year-old house, which is itself crushed under a heavy mortgage. The last squire dragged out his existence there, living the horrible life of an aristocratic pauper; but his only son, my stepfather, seeing that he must adapt himself to the new conditions, obtained an advance from a relative, which enabled him to take a medical degree, and went out to Calcutta, where, by his professional skill and his force of character, he established a large practice. In a fit of

anger, however, caused by some robberies which had been perpetrated in the house, he beat his native butler to death, and narrowly escaped a capital sentence. As it was, he suffered a long term of imprisonment, and afterwards returned to England a morose and disappointed man.

"When Dr. Roylott was in India he married my mother, Mrs. Stoner, the young widow of Major-General Stoner, of the Bengal Artillery. My sister Julia and I were twins, and we were only two years old at the time of my mother's re-marriage. She had a considerable sum of money, not less than a thousand a year, and this she bequeathed to Dr. Roylott entirely whilst we resided with him, with a provision that a certain annual sum should be allowed to each of us in the event of our marriage. Shortly after our return to England my mother died—she was killed eight years ago in a railway accident near Crewe. Dr. Roylott then abandoned his attempts to establish himself in practice in London, and took us to live with him in the ancestral house at Stoke Moran. The money which my mother had left was enough for all our wants, and there seemed no obstacle to our happiness.

"But a terrible change came over our stepfather about this time. Instead of making friends and exchanging visits with our neighbours, who had at first been overjoyed to see a Roylott of Stoke Moran back in the old family seat, he shut himself up in his house, and seldom came out save to indulge in ferocious quarrels with whoever might cross his path. Violence of temper approaching to mania has been hereditary in the men of the family, and in my stepfather's case it had, I believe, been intensified by his long residence in the

tropics. A series of disgraceful ^{noisy} brawls took place, two of which ended in the police-court, until at last he became the terror of the village, and the folks would fly at his approach, for he is a man of immense strength, ^{huge} and absolutely uncontrollable in his anger. ^{dismembered}

“Last week he hurled the local blacksmith over a parapet into a stream and it was only by paying over all the money I could gather together that I was able to avert another public exposure. He had no friends at all save the wandering gypsies, and he would give these vagabonds leave to encamp upon the few acres of ^{about} bramble-covered land which represent the family estate, and would accept in return the hospitality of their tents, wandering away with them sometimes for weeks on end. He has a passion also for Indian animals, which are sent over to him by a correspondent, and he has at this moment a cheetah and a baboon, which wander freely over his grounds, and are feared by the villagers almost as much as their master.

“You can imagine from what I say that my poor sister Julia and I had no great pleasure in our lives. No servant would stay with us, and for a long time we did all the work of the house. She was but thirty at the time of her death, and yet her hair had already begun to whiten, even as mine has.”

“Your sister is dead, then?”

“She died just two years ago, and it is of her death that I wish to speak to you. You can understand that, living the life which I have described, we were little likely to see anyone of our own age and position. We had, however, an aunt, my mother's maiden sister, Miss Honoria Westphail, who lives near Harrow, and we were occasionally allowed to pay short visits at this

lady's house. Julia went there at Christmas two years ago, and met there a half-pay Major of Marines, to whom she became engaged. My stepfather learned of the engagement when my sister returned, and offered no objection to the marriage; but within a fortnight of the day which had been fixed for the wedding, the terrible event occurred which has deprived me of my only companion."

Sherlock Holmes had been leaning back in his chair with his eyes closed and his head sunk in a cushion, but he half opened his lids now, and glanced across at his visitor.

"Pray be precise as to details," said he.

"It is easy for me to be so, for every event of that dreadful time is seared into my memory. The manor house is, as I have already said, very old, and only one wing is now inhabited. The bedrooms in this wing are on the ground floor, the sitting-rooms being in the central block of the buildings. Of these bedrooms, the first is Dr. Roylott's, the second my sister's, and the third my own. There is no communication between them, but they all open out into the same corridor. Do I make myself plain?"

"Perfectly so."

"The windows of the three rooms open out upon the lawn. That fatal night Dr. Roylott had gone to his room early, though we knew that he had not retired to rest, for my sister was troubled by the smell of the strong Indian cigars which it was his custom to smoke. She left her room, therefore, and came into mine, where she sat for some time, chatting about her approaching wedding. At eleven o'clock she rose to leave me, but she paused at the door and looked back.

“‘Tell me, Helen,’ said she, ‘have you ever heard anyone whistle in the dead of the night?’”

“‘Never,’ said I.

“‘I suppose that you could not possibly whistle yourself in your sleep?’”

“‘Certainly not. But why?’”

“‘Because during the last few nights I have always, about three in the morning, heard a low clear whistle. I am a light sleeper, and it has awakened me. I cannot tell where it came from—perhaps from the next room, perhaps from the lawn. I thought that I would just ask you whether you had heard it.’”

“‘No, I have not. It must be those wretched gipsies in the plantation.’”

“‘Very likely. And yet if it were on the lawn I wonder that you did not hear it also.’”

“‘Ah, but I sleep more heavily than you.’”

“‘Well, it is of no great consequence at any rate,’ she smiled back at me, closed my door, and a few moments later I heard her key turn in the lock.”

“‘Indeed,’ said Holmes. “Was it your custom always to lock yourselves in at night?’”

“‘Always.’”

“‘And why?’”

“‘I think that I mentioned to you that the Doctor kept a cheetah and a baboon. We had no feeling of security unless our doors were locked.’”

“‘Quite so. Pray proceed with your statement.’”

“‘I could not sleep that night. A vague feeling of impending misfortune impressed me. My sister and I, you will recollect, were twins, and you know how subtle are the links which bind two souls which are so

closely allied. It was a wild night. The wind was howling outside, and the rain was beating and splashing against the windows. Suddenly, amidst all the hubbub of the gale, there burst forth the wild scream of a terrified woman. I knew that it was my sister's voice. I sprang from my bed, wrapped a shawl round me, and rushed into the corridor. As I opened my door I seemed to hear a low whistle, such as my sister described, and a few moments later a clanging sound, as if a mass of metal had fallen. As I ran down the passage my sister's door was unlocked, and revolved slowly upon its hinges. I stared at it horror-stricken, not knowing what was about to issue from it. By the light of the corridor lamp I saw my sister appear at the opening, her face blanched with terror, her hands groping for help, her whole figure swaying to and fro like that of a drunkard. I ran to her and threw my arms round her, but at that moment her knees seemed to give way and she fell to the ground. She writhed as one who is in terrible pain, and her limbs were dreadfully convulsed. At first I thought that she had not recognised me, but as I bent over her she suddenly shrieked out in a voice which I shall never forget, 'O, my God! Helen! It was the band! The speckled band!' There was something else which she would fain have said, and she stabbed with her finger into the air in the direction of the Doctor's room, but a fresh convulsion seized her and choked her words. I rushed out, calling loudly for my stepfather, and I met him hastening from his room in his dressing-gown. When he reached my sister's side she was unconscious, and though he poured brandy down her throat, and sent for medical aid from the village, all efforts were in vain, for she slowly sank and died with-

out having recovered her consciousness. Such was the dreadful end of my beloved sister."

"One moment," said Holmes; "are you sure about this whistle and metallic sound? Could you swear to it?"

"That was what the county coroner asked me at the inquiry. It is my strong impression that I heard it, and yet among the crash of the gale, and the creaking of an old house, I may possibly have been deceived."

"Was your sister dressed?"

"No, she was in her nightdress. In her right hand was found the charred stump of a match, and in her left a matchbox."

"Showing that she had struck a light and looked about her when the alarm took place. That is important. And what conclusions did the coroner come to?"

"He investigated the case with great care, for Dr. Roylott's conduct had long been notorious in the county, but he was unable to find any satisfactory cause of death. My evidence showed that the door had been fastened upon the inner side, and the windows were blocked by old-fashioned shutters with broad iron bars, which were secured every night. The walls were carefully sounded, and were shown to be quite solid all round, and the flooring was also thoroughly examined, with the same result. The chimney is wide, but is barred up by four large staples. It is certain, therefore, that my sister was quite alone when she met her end. Besides, there were no marks of any violence upon her."

"How about poison?"

"The doctors examined her for it, but without success."

"What do you think that this unfortunate lady died of, then?"

"It is my belief that she died of pure fear and nervous shock, though what it was which frightened her I cannot imagine."

"Were there gipsies in the plantation at the time?"

"Yes, there are nearly always some there."

"Ah, and what did you gather from this allusion to a band—a speckled band?"

"Sometimes I have thought that it was merely the wild talk of delirium, sometimes that it may have referred to some band of people, perhaps to these very gipsies in the plantation. I do not know whether the spotted handkerchiefs which so many of them wear over their heads might have suggested the strange adjective which she used."

Holmes shook his head like a man who is far from being satisfied.

"These are very deep waters," said he; "pray go on with your narrative."

"Two years have passed since then, and my life has been until lately lonelier than ever. A month ago, however, a dear friend, whom I have known for many years, has done me the honour to ask my hand in marriage. His name is Armitage—Percy Armitage—the second son of Mr. Armitage, of Crane Water, near Reading. My stepfather has offered no opposition to the match, and we are to be married in the course of the spring. Two days ago some repairs were started in the west wing of the building, and my bedroom wall has been pierced, so that I have had to move into the chamber in which my sister died, and to sleep in the very bed in which she slept. Imagine, then, my thrill of terror

when last night, as I lay awake, thinking over her terrible fate, I suddenly heard in the silence of the night the low whistle which had been the herald of her own death. I sprang up and lit the lamp, but nothing was to be seen in the room. I was too shaken to go to bed again, however, so I dressed, and as soon as it was daylight I slipped down, got a dog-cart at the Crown Inn, which is opposite, and drove to Leatherhead, from whence I have come on this morning, with the one object of seeing you and asking your advice."

"You have done wisely," said my friend. "But have you told me all?"

"Yes, all."

"Miss Stoner, you have not. You are screening your stepfather."

"Why, what do you mean?"

For answer Holmes pushed back the frill of black lace which fringed the hand that lay upon our visitor's knee. Five little livid spots, the marks of four fingers and a thumb, were printed upon the white wrist.

"You have been cruelly used," said Holmes.

The lady coloured deeply, and covered over her injured wrist. "He is a hard man," she said, "and perhaps he hardly knows his own strength."

There was a long silence, during which Holmes leaned his chin upon his hands and stared into the crackling fire.

"This is very deep business," he said at last. "There are a thousand details which I should desire to know before I decide upon our course of action. Yet we have not a moment to lose. If we were to come to Stoke Moran to-day, would it be possible for us to see

over these rooms without the knowledge of your stepfather?"

"As it happens, he spoke of coming into town to-day upon some most important business. It is probable that he will be away all day, and that there would be nothing to disturb you. We have a housekeeper now, but she is old and foolish, and I could easily get her out of the way."

"Excellent. You are not averse to this trip, Watson?"

"By no means."

"Then we shall both come. What are you going to do yourself?"

"I have one or two things which I would wish to do now that I am in town. But I shall return by the twelve o'clock train, so as to be there in time for your coming."

"And you may expect us early in the afternoon. I have myself some small business matters to attend to. Will you not wait and breakfast?"

"No, I must go. My heart is lightened already since I have confided my trouble to you. I shall look forward to seeing you again this afternoon." She dropped her thick black veil over her face, and glided from the room.

"And what do you think of it all, Watson?" asked Sherlock Holmes, leaning back in his chair.

"It seems to me to be a most dark and sinister business."

"Dark enough and sinister enough."

"Yet if the lady is correct in saying that the flooring and walls are sound, and that the door, window, and chimney are impassable, then her sister must have been

undoubtedly alone when she met her mysterious end."

"What becomes, then, of these nocturnal whistles, and what of the very peculiar words of the dying woman?"

"I cannot think."

"When you combine the ideas of whistles at night, the presence of a band of gipsies who are on intimate terms with this old doctor, the fact that we have every reason to believe that the doctor has an interest in preventing his stepdaughter's marriage, the dying allusion to a band, and finally, the fact that Miss Helen Stoner heard a metallic clang, which might have been caused by one of those metal bars which secured the shutters falling back into their place, I think there is good ground to think that the mystery may be cleared along those lines."

"But what, then, did the gipsies do?"

"I cannot imagine."

"I see many objections to any such a theory."

"And so do I. It is precisely for that reason that we are going to Stoke Moran this day. I want to see whether the objections are fatal, or if they may be explained away. But what, in the name of the devil!"

The ejaculation had been drawn from my companion by the fact that our door had been suddenly dashed open, and that a huge man framed himself in the aperture. His costume was a peculiar mixture of the professional and of the agricultural, having a black top-hat, a long frock-coat, and a pair of high gaiters, with a hunting-crop swinging in his hand. So tall was he that his hat actually brushed the cross-bar of the doorway, and his

breadth seemed to span it across from side to side. A large face, seared with a thousand wrinkles, burned yellow with the sun, and marked with every evil passion, was turned from one to the other of us, while his deep-set, bile-shot eyes, and the high thin fleshless nose, gave him somewhat the resemblance to a fierce old bird of prey.

"Which of you is Holmes?" asked this apparition.

"My name, sir, but you have the advantage of me," said my companion quietly.

"I am Dr. Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran."

"Indeed, Doctor," said Holmes blandly. "Pray take a seat."

"I will do nothing of the kind. My stepdaughter has been here. I have traced her. What has she been saying to you?"

"It is a little cold for the time of the year," said Holmes.

"What has she been saying to you?" screamed the old man furiously.

"But I have heard that the crocuses promise well," continued my companion imperturbably.

"Ha! You put me off, do you?" said our new visitor, taking a step forward and shaking his hunting-crop. "I know you, you scoundrel! I have heard of you before. You are Holmes the meddler."

My friend smiled.

"Holmes the busybody!"

His smile broadened.

"Holmes the Scotland-yard Jack-in-office."

Holmes chuckled heartily. "Your conversation is most entertaining," said he. "When you go out close the door, for there is a decided draught."

"I will go when I have had my say. Don't you dare to meddle with my affairs. I know that Miss Stoner has been here—I traced her! I am a dangerous man to fall foul of! See here." He stepped swiftly forward, seized the poker, and bent it into a curve with his huge brown hands.

"See that you keep yourself out of my grip," he sarled, and hurling the twisted poker into the fireplace, he strode out of the room.

"He seems a very amiable person," said Holmes, laughing. "I am not quite so bulky, but if he had remained I might have shown him that my grip was not much more feeble than his own." As he spoke he picked up the steel poker, and with a sudden effort straightened it out again.

"Fancy his having the insolence to confound me with the official detective force! This incident gives zest to our investigation, however, and I only trust that our little friend will not suffer from her imprudence in allowing this brute to trace her. And now, Watson, we shall order breakfast, and afterwards I shall walk down to Doctors' Commons, where I hope to get some new data which may help us in this matter."

It was nearly one o'clock when Sherlock Holmes returned from his excursion. He held in his hand a sheet of blue paper, scrawled over with notes and figures.

"I have seen the will of the deceased wife," said he. "To determine its exact meaning I have been obliged to work out the present prices of the investments with which it is concerned. The total income, which at the time of the wife's death was little short of £1,100, is now

through the fall in agricultural prices not more than £750. Each daughter can claim an income of £250, in case of marriage. It is evident, therefore, that if both girls had married this beauty would have had a mere pittance, while even one of them would cripple him to a serious extent. My morning's work has not been wasted, since it has proved that he has the very strongest motives for standing in the way of anything of the sort. And now, Watson, this is too serious for dawdling, especially as the old man is aware that we are interesting ourselves in his affairs, so if you are ready we shall call a cab and drive to Waterloo. I should be very much obliged if you would slip your revolver into your pocket. An Eley's No. 2 is an excellent argument with gentlemen who can twist steel poker into knots. That and a tooth-brush are, I think, all that we need."

At Waterloo we were fortunate in catching a train for Leatherhead, where we hired a trap at the station inn, and drove for four or five miles through the lovely Surrey lanes. It was a perfect day, with a bright sun and a few fleecy clouds in the heavens. The trees and wayside hedges were just throwing out their first green shoots, and the air was full of the pleasant smell of the moist earth. To me at least there was a strange contrast between the sweet promise of the spring and this sinister quest upon which we were engaged. My companion sat in front of the trap, his arms folded, his hat pulled down over his eyes, and his chin sunk upon his breast, buried in the deepest thought. Suddenly, however, he started, tapped me on the shoulder, and pointed over the meadows.

"Look there!" said he.

A heavily-timbered park stretched up in a gentle

slope, thickening into a grove at the highest point. From amidst the branches there jutted out the grey gables and high roof-tree of a very old mansion.

"Stoke Moran?" said he.

"Yes, sir, that be the house of Dr. Grimesby Roylott," remarked the driver.

"There is some building going on there," said Holmes; "that is where we are going."

"There's the village," said the driver, pointing to a cluster of roofs some distance to the left; "but if you want to get to the house, you'll find it shorter to go over this stile, and so by the foot-path over the fields. There it is, where the lady is walking."

"And the lady, I fancy, is Miss Stoner," observed Holmes, shading his eyes. "Yes, I think we had better do as you suggest."

We got off, paid our fare, and the trap rattled back on its way to Leatherhead.

"I thought it as well," said Holmes, as we climbed the stile, "that this fellow should think we had come here as architects, or on some definite business. It may stop his gossip. Good afternoon, Miss Stoner. You see that we have been as good as our word."

Our client of the morning had hurried forward to meet us with a face which spoke her joy. "I have been waiting so eagerly for you," she cried, shaking hands with us warmly. "All has turned out splendidly. Dr. Roylott has gone to town, and it is unlikely that he will be back before evening."

"We have had the pleasure of making the Doctor's acquaintance," said Holmes, and in a few words he sketched out what had occurred. Miss Stoner turned white to the lips as she listened.

"Good heavens!" she cried, "he has followed me, then."

"So it appears."

"He is so cunning that I never know when I am safe from him. What will he say when he returns?"

"He must guard himself, for he may find that there is someone more cunning than himself upon his track. You must lock yourself from him to-night. If he is violent, we shall take you away to your aunt's at Harrow. Now, we must make the best use of our time, so kindly take us at once to the rooms which we are to examine."

The building was of grey lichen-blotched stone, with a high central portion, and two curving wings, like the claws of a crab, thrown out on each side. In one of these wings the windows were broken, and blocked with wooden boards, while the roof was partly caved in, a picture of ruin. The central portion was in little better repair, but the right-hand block was comparatively modern, and the blinds in the windows, with the blue smoke curling up from the chimneys, showed that this *my* was where the family resided. Some scaffolding had been erected against the end wall, and the stonework had been broken into, but there were no signs of any workmen at the moment of our visit. Holmes walked slowly up and down the ill-trimmed lawn, and examined with deep attention the outsides of the windows.

"This, I take it, belongs to the room in which you used to sleep, the centre one to your sister's, and the one next to the main building to Dr. Roylott's chamber?"

"Exactly so. But I am now sleeping in the middle one."

"Pending the alterations, as I understand. By the way, there does not seem to be any very pressing need for repairs at that end wall."

"There were none. I believe that it was an excuse to move me from my room."

"Ah! that is suggestive. Now, on the other side of this narrow wing runs the corridor from which these three rooms open. There are windows in it, of course?"

"Yes, but very small ones. Too narrow for anyone to pass through."

"As you both locked your doors at night your rooms were unapproachable from that side. Now, would you have the kindness to go into your room, and to bar your shutters?"

Miss Stoner did so, and Holmes, after a careful examination through the open window, endeavoured in every way to force the shutter open, but without success. There was no slit through which a knife could be passed to raise the bar. Then with his lens he tested the hinges, but they were of solid iron, built firmly into the massive masonry. "Hum!" said he, scratching his chin in some perplexity, "my theory certainly presents some difficulties. No one could pass these shutters if they were bolted. Well, we shall see if the inside throws any light upon the matter."

A small side-door led into the whitewashed corridor from which the three bedrooms opened. Holmes refused to examine the third chamber, so we passed at once to the second, that in which Miss Stoner was now sleeping, and in which her sister had met her fate. It was a homely little room, with a low ceiling and a gaping fireplace, after the fashion of old country houses. A brown chest of drawers stood in one corner, a narrow

white-counterpaned bed in another, and a dressing-table on the left-hand side of the window. These articles, with two small wickerwork chairs, made up all the furniture in the room, save for a square of Wilton carpet in the centre. The boards round and the panelling of the walls were brown, worm-eaten oak, so old and discoloured that it may have dated from the original building of the house. Holmes drew one of the chairs into a corner and sat silent, while his eyes travelled round and round and up and down, taking in every detail of the apartment.

"Where does that bell communicate with?" he asked at last, pointing to a thick bell-rope which hung down beside the bed, the tassel actually lying upon the pillow.

"It goes to the housekeeper's room."

"It looks newer than the other things?"

"Yes, it was only put there a couple of years ago."

"Your sister asked for it, I suppose?"

"No, I never heard of her using it. We used always to get what we wanted for ourselves."

"Indeed, it seemed unnecessary to put so nice a bell-pull there. You will excuse me for a few minutes while I satisfy myself as to this floor." He threw himself down upon his face with his lens in his hand, and crawled swiftly backwards and forwards, examining minutely the cracks between the boards. Then he did the same with the woodwork with which the chamber was panelled. Finally he walked over to the bed and spent some time in staring at it, and in running his eye up and down the wall. Finally he took the bell-rope in his hand and gave it a brisk tug.

"Why, it's a dummy," said he. *not ringing bell*
"Won't it ring?"

"No, it is not even attached to a wire. This is very interesting. You can see now that it is fastened to a hook just above where the little opening of the ventilator is."

"How very absurd! I never noticed that before."

"Very strange!" muttered Holmes, pulling at the rope. "There are one or two very singular points about this room. For example, what a fool a builder must be to open a ventilator in another room, when, with the same trouble, he might have communicated with the outside air!"

"That is also quite modern," said the lady.

"Done about the same time as the bell-rope," remarked Holmes.

"Yes, there were several little changes carried out about that time."

"They seem to have been of a most interesting character—dummy bell-ropes, and ventilators which do not ventilate. With your permission, Miss Stoner, we shall now carry our researches into the inner apartment."

Dr. Grimesby Roylott's chamber was larger than that of his stepdaughter, but was as plainly furnished. A camp bed, a small wooden shelf full of books, mostly of a technical character, an arm-chair beside the bed, a plain wooden chair against the wall, a round table, and a large iron safe were the principal things which met the eye. Holmes walked slowly round and examined each and all of them with the keenest interest.

"What's in here?" he asked, tapping the safe.

"My stepfather's business papers."

"Oh! you have seen inside, then?"

"Only once, some years ago. I remember that it was full of papers."

"There isn't a cat in it, for example?"

"No. What a strange idea!"

"Well, look at this!" He took up a small saucer of milk which stood on the top of it.

"No; we don't keep a cat. But there is a cheetah and a baboon."

"Ah, yes, of course! Well, a cheetah is just a big cat, and yet a saucer of milk does not go very far in satisfying its wants, I dare say. There is one point which I should wish to determine." He squatted down in front of the wooden chair, and examined the seat of it with the greatest attention.

"Thank you. That is quite settled," said he, rising and putting his lens in his pocket. "Hullo! here is something interesting!"

The object which had caught his eye was a small dog lash hung on one corner of the bed. The lash, however, was curled upon itself, and tied so as to make a loop of whipcord.

"What do you make of that, Watson?"

"It's a common enough lash. But I don't know why it should be tied."

"That is not quite so common, is it? Ah me! it's a wicked world, and when a clever man turns his brain to crime it is the worst of all. I think that I have seen enough now, Miss Stoner, and, with your permission, we shall walk out upon the lawn."

I had never seen my friend's face so grim, or his brow so dark, as it was when we turned from the scene of this investigation. We had walked several times

up and down the lawn, neither Miss Stoner nor myself liking to break in upon his thoughts before he roused himself from his reverie. *disturb* *deeper thinking*

"It is very essential, Miss Stoner," said he, "that you should absolutely follow my advice in every respect."

"I shall most certainly do so."

"The matter is too serious for any hesitation. Your life may depend upon your compliance." *any one*

"I assure you that I am in your hands."

"In the first place, both my friend and I must spend the night in your room."

Both Miss Stoner and I gazed at him in astonishment.

"Yes, it must be so. Let me explain. I believe that that is the village inn over there?"

"Yes, that is the 'Crown.'"

"Very good. Your windows would be visible from there?"

"Certainly."

"You must confine yourself to your room, on pretence of a headache, when your stepfather comes back. Then when you hear him retire for the night, you must open the shutters of your window, undo the hasp, put your lamp there as a signal to us, and then withdraw with everything which you are likely to want into the room which you used to occupy. I have no doubt that, in spite of the repairs, you could manage there for one night."

"Oh, yes, easily."

"The rest you will leave in our hands."

"But what will you do?"

"We shall spend the night in your room, and we shall investigate the cause of this noise which has disturbed you."

"I believe, Mr. Holmes, that you have already made up your mind," said Miss Stoner, laying her hand upon my companion's sleeve.

"Perhaps I have."

"Then for pity's sake tell me what was the cause of my sister's death."

"I should prefer to have clearer proofs before I speak."

"You can at least tell me whether my own thought is correct, and if she died from some sudden fright."

"No, I do not think so. I think that there was probably some more tangible cause. And now, Miss Stoner, we must leave you, for if Dr. Roylott returned and saw us, our journey would be in vain. Good-bye, and be brave, for if you will do what I have told you, you may rest assured that we shall soon drive away the dangers that threaten you."

Sherlock Holmes and I had no difficulty in engaging a bedroom and sitting-room at the Crown Inn. They were on the upper floor, and from our window we could command a view of the avenue gate, and of the inhabited wing of Stoke Moran Manor House. At dusk we saw Dr. Grimesby Roylott drive past, his huge form looming up beside the little figure of the lad who drove him. The boy had some slight difficulty in undoing the heavy iron gates, and we heard the hoarse roar of the Doctor's voice, and saw the fury with which he shook his clenched fists at him. The trap drove on, and a few minutes later we saw a sudden light spring up among the trees as the lamp was lit in one of the sitting-rooms.

"Do you know, Watson," said Holmes, as we sat together in the gathering darkness, "I have really

some scruples as to taking you to-night. There is a distinct element of danger."

"Can I be of assistance?"

"Your presence might be invaluable."

"Then I shall certainly come."

"It is very kind of you."

"You speak of danger. You have evidently seen more in these rooms than was visible to me."

"No, but I fancy that I may have deduced a little more. I imagine that you saw all that I did."

"I saw nothing remarkable save the bell-rope, and what purpose that could answer I confess is more than I can imagine."

"You saw the ventilator, too?"

"Yes, but I do not think that it is such a very unusual thing to have a small opening between two rooms. It was so small that a rat could hardly pass through."

"I knew that we should find a ventilator before ever we came to Stoke Moran."

"My dear Holmes!"

"Oh, yes, I did. You remember in her statement she said that her sister could smell Dr. Roylott's cigar. Now, of course that suggests at once that there must be a communication between the two rooms. It could only be a small one, or it would have been remarked upon at the coroner's inquiry. I deduced a ventilator."

"But what harm can there be in that?"

"Well, there is at least a curious coincidence of dates. A ventilator is made, a cord is hung, and a lady who sleeps in the bed dies. Does not that strike you?"

"I cannot as yet see any connection."

"Did you observe anything very peculiar about that bed?"

"No."

"It was clamped to the floor. Did you ever see a bed fastened like that before?"

"I cannot say that I have."

"The lady could not move her bed. It must always be in the same relative position to the ventilator and to the rope—for so we may call it, since it was clearly never meant for a bell-pull."

"Holmes," I cried, "I seem to see dimly what you are hitting at. We are only just in time to prevent some subtle and horrible crime."

"Subtle enough and horrible enough. When a doctor does go wrong he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge. Palmer and Pritchard were among the heads of their profession. This man strikes even deeper, but I think, Watson, that we shall be able to strike deeper still. But we shall have horrors enough before the night is over: for goodness' sake let us have a quiet pipe, and turn our minds for a few hours to something more cheerful." ✓✓✓ *W. L. G.*

About nine o'clock the light among the trees was extinguished and all was dark in the direction of the Manor House. Two hours passed slowly away, and then, suddenly, just at the stroke of eleven, a single bright light shone out right in front of us.

"That is our signal," said Holmes, springing to his feet; "it comes from the middle window."

As we passed out he exchanged a few words with the landlord, explaining that we were going on a late visit to an acquaintance, and that it was possible that we might spend the night there. A moment later we were out on the dark road, a chill wind blowing in our faces,

and one yellow light twinkling in front of us through the gloom to guide us on our sombre errand.

There was little difficulty in entering the grounds, for unrepaired breaches gaped in the old park wall. Making our way among the trees, we reached the lawn, crossed it, and were about to enter through the window, when out from a clump of laurel bushes there darted what seemed to be a hideous and distorted child, who threw itself on the grass with writhing limbs, and then ran swiftly across the lawn into the darkness.

"My God!" I whispered, "did you see it?"

Holmes was for the moment as startled as I. His hand closed like a vice upon my wrist in his agitation. Then he broke into a low laugh, and put his lips to my ear.

"It is a nice household," he murmured, "that is the baboon."

I had forgotten the strange pets which the Doctor affected. There was the cheetah, too; perhaps we might find it upon our shoulders at any moment. I confess that I felt easier in my mind when, after following Holmes' example and slipping off my shoes, I found myself inside the bedroom. My companion noiselessly closed the shutters, moved the lamp on to the table, and cast his eyes round the room. All was as we had seen it in the day-time. Then creeping up to me and making a trumpet of his hand, he whispered into my ear again so gently that it was all that I could do to distinguish the words:

"The least sound would be fatal to our plans."

I nodded to show that I had heard.

"We must sit without a light. He would see it through the ventilator."

I nodded again.

"Do not go to sleep; your very life may depend upon it. Have your pistol ready in case we should need it. I will sit on the side of the bed, and you in that chair."

I took out my revolver and laid it on the corner of the table.

Holmes had brought up a long thin cane, and this he placed upon the bed beside him. By it he laid the box of matches and the stump of a candle. Then he turned down the lamp and we were left in darkness.

How shall I ever forget that dreadful vigil? I could not hear a sound, not even the drawing of a breath, and yet I knew that my companion sat open-eyed, within a few feet of me, in the same state of nervous tension in which I was myself. The shutters cut off the least ray of light, and we waited in absolute darkness. From outside came the occasional cry of a night-bird, and once at our very window a long drawn, cat-like whine, which told us that the cheetah was indeed at liberty. Far away we could hear the deep tones of the parish clock, which boomed out every quarter of an hour. How long they seemed, those quarters! Twelve o'clock, and one, and two, and three, and still we sat waiting silently for whatever might befall.

Suddenly there was the momentary gleam of a light up in the direction of the ventilator, which vanished immediately, but was succeeded by a strong smell of burning oil and heated metal. Some one in the next room had lit a dark lantern. I heard a gentle sound of movement, and then all was silent once more, though the smell grew stronger. For half an hour I sat with straining ears. Then suddenly another sound became

audible—a very gentle, soothing sound, like that of a small jet of steam escaping continually from a kettle. The instant that we heard it, Holmes sprang from the bed, struck a match, and lashed furiously with his cane at the bell-pull.

“You see it, Watson?” he yelled. “You see it?”

But I saw nothing. At the moment when Holmes struck the light I heard a low, clear whistle, but the sudden glare flashing into my weary eyes made it impossible for me to tell what it was at which my friend lashed so savagely. I could, however, see that his face was deadly pale, and filled with horror and loathing.

He had ceased to strike, and was gazing up at the ventilator, when suddenly there broke from the silence of the night the most horrible cry to which I have ever listened. It swelled up louder and louder, a hoarse yell of pain and fear and anger all mingled in the one dreadful shriek. They say that away down in the village, and even in the distant parsonage, that cry raised the sleepers from their beds. It struck cold to our hearts, and I stood gazing at Holmes, and he at me, until the last echoes of it had died away into the silence from which it rose.

“What can it mean?” I gasped.

“It means that it is all over,” Holmes answered. “And perhaps, after all, it is all for the best. Take your pistol, and we shall enter Dr. Roylott’s room.”

With a grave face he lit the lamp, and led the way down the corridor. Twice he struck at the chamber door without any reply from within. Then he turned the handle and entered, I at his heels, with the cocked pistol in my hand.

It was a singular sight which met our eyes. On the

table stood a dark lantern with the shutter half open, throwing a brilliant beam of light upon the iron safe, the door of which was ajar. Beside this table, on the wooden chair, sat Dr. Grimesby Roylott, clad in a long grey dressing-gown, his bare ankles protruding beneath, and his feet thrust into red heelless Turkish slippers. Across his lap lay the short stock with the long lash which we had noticed during the day. His chin was cocked upwards, and his eyes were fixed in a dreadful rigid stare at the corner of the ceiling. Round his brow he had a peculiar yellow band, with brownish speckles, which seemed to be bound tightly round his head. As we entered he made neither sound nor motion.

"The band! the speckled band!" whispered Holmes.

I took a step forward. In an instant his strange head-gear began to move, and there reared itself from among his hair the squat diamond-shaped head and puffed neck of a loathsome serpent.

"It is a swamp adder!" cried Holmes—"the deadliest snake in India. He has died within ten seconds of being bitten. Violence does, in truth, recoil upon the violent, and the schemer falls into the pit which he digs for another. Let us thrust this creature back into its den, and we can then remove Miss Stoner to some place of shelter, and let the county police know what has happened."

As he spoke he drew the dog whip swiftly from the dead man's lap, and throwing the noose round the reptile's neck, he drew it from its horrid perch, and, carrying it at arm's length, threw it into the iron safe, which he closed upon it.

Such are the true facts of the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran. It is not necessary that I should prolong a narrative which has already run to too great a length, by telling how we broke the sad news to the terrified girl, how we conveyed her by the morning train to the care of her good aunt at Harrow, of how the slow process of official inquiry came to the conclusion that the Doctor met his fate while indiscreetly playing with a dangerous pet. The little which I had yet to learn of the case was told me by Sherlock Holmes as we travelled back next day.

"I had," said he, "come to an entirely erroneous conclusion, which shows, my dear Watson, how dangerous it always is to reason from insufficient data. The presence of the gipsies, and the use of the word 'band,' which was used by the poor girl, no doubt, to explain the appearance which she had caught a horrid glimpse of by the light of her match, were sufficient to put me upon an entirely wrong scent. I can only claim the merit that I instantly reconsidered my position when, however, it became clear to me that whatever danger threatened an occupant of the room could not come either from the window or the door. My attention was speedily drawn, as I have already remarked to you, to this ventilator, and to the bell-rope which hung down to the bed. The discovery that this was a dummy and that the bed was clamped to the floor, instantly gave rise to the suspicion that the rope was there as a bridge for something passing through the hole, and coming to the bed. The idea of a snake instantly occurred to me, and when I coupled it with my knowledge that the Doctor was furnished with a supply of creatures from India, I felt that I was probably on the right track. The

idea of using a form of poison which could not possibly be discovered by any chemical test was just such a one as would occur to a clever and ruthless man who had had an Eastern training. The rapidity with which such a poison would take effect would also, from his point of view, be an advantage. It would be a sharp-eyed coroner indeed who could distinguish the two little dark punctures which would show where the poison fangs had done their work. Then I thought of the whistle. Of course, he must recall the snake before the morning light revealed it to the victim. He had trained it, probably by the use of the milk which we saw, to return to him when summoned. He would put it through the ventilator at the hour that he thought best, with the certainty that it would crawl down the rope, and land on the bed. It might or might not bite the occupant, perhaps she might escape every night for a week, but sooner or later she must fall a victim.

"I had come to these conclusions before ever I had entered his room. An inspection of his chair showed me that he had been in the habit of standing on it, which, of course, would be necessary in order that he should reach the ventilator. The sight of the safe, the saucer of milk, and the loop of whipcord were enough to finally dispel any doubts which may have remained. The metallic clang heard by Miss Stoner was obviously caused by her father hastily closing the door of his safe upon its terrible occupant. Having once made up my mind, you know the steps which I took in order to put the matter to the proof. I heard the creature hiss, as I have no doubt that you did also, and I instantly lit the light and attacked it."

"With the result of driving it through the ventilator."

"And also with the result of causing it to turn upon its master at the other side. Some of the blows of my cane came home, and roused its snakish temper, so that it flew upon the first person it saw. In this way I am no doubt indirectly responsible for Dr. Grimesby Roylott's death, and I cannot say that it is likely to weigh very heavily upon my conscience."

From "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes."

II

THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AT LARGE

R. AUSTIN FREEMAN

THORNDYKE was not a newspaper reader. He viewed with extreme disfavour all scrappy and miscellaneous forms of literature, which, by presenting a disorderly series of unrelated items of information, tended, as he considered, to destroy the habit of consecutive mental effort.

"It is most important," he once remarked to me, "habitually to pursue a definite train of thought, and to pursue it to a finish, instead of flitting indolently from one uncompleted topic to another, as the newspaper reader is so apt to do. Still, there is no harm in a daily paper—so long as you don't read it."

Accordingly he patronized a morning paper, and his method of dealing with it was characteristic. The paper was laid on the table after breakfast, together with a blue pencil and a pair of office shears. A preliminary glance through the sheets enabled him to mark with the pencil those paragraphs that were to be read, and these were presently cut out and looked through, after which they were either thrown away or set aside to be pasted in an indexed book.

The whole proceeding occupied, on an average, a quarter of an hour.

On the morning of which I am now speaking he was thus engaged. The pencil had done its work, and the

snick of the shears announced the final stage. Presently he paused with a newly-excised cutting between his fingers, and, after glancing at it for a moment, he handed it to me.

"Another art robbery," he remarked. "Mysterious affairs, these—as to motive, I mean. You can't melt down a picture or an ivory carving, and you can't put them on the market as they stand. The very qualities that give them their value make them totally unnegotiable."

"Yet I suppose," said I, "the really inveterate collector—the pottery or stamp maniac, for instance—will buy these contraband goods even though he dare not show them."

"Probably. No doubt the *cupiditas habendi*, the mere desire to possess, is the motive force rather than any intelligent purpose——"

The discussion was at this point interrupted by a knock at the door, and a moment later my colleague admitted two gentlemen. One of these I recognised as a Mr. Marchmont, a solicitor, for whom we had occasionally acted; the other was a stranger—a typical Hebrew of the blonde type—good-looking, faultlessly dressed, carrying a bandbox, and obviously in a state of the most extreme agitation.

"Good-morning to you, gentlemen," said Mr. Marchmont, shaking hands cordially. "I have brought a client of mine to see you, and when I tell you that his name is Solomon Löwe, it will be unnecessary for me to say what our business is."

"Oddly enough," replied Thorndyke, "we were, at the very moment when you knocked, discussing the bearings of his case."

"It is a horrible affair!" burst in Mr. Löwe. "I am distracted! I am ruined! I am in despair!"

He banged the bandbox down on the table, and flinging himself into a chair, buried his face in his hands.

"Come, come," remonstrated Marchmont, "we must be brave, we must be composed. Tell Dr. Thorndyke your story, and let us hear what he thinks of it."

He leaned back in his chair, and looked at his client with that air of patient fortitude that comes to us all so easily when we contemplate the misfortunes of other people. ✓

"You must help us, sir," exclaimed Löwe, starting up again—"you must, indeed, or I shall go mad. But I shall tell you what has happened, and then you must act at once. Spare no effort and no expense. Money is no object—at least, not in reason," he added, with native caution. He sat down once more, and in perfect English, though with a slight German accent, proceeded volubly: "My brother Isaac is probably known to you by name."

Thorndyke nodded.

"He is a great collector, and to some extent a dealer—that is to say, he makes his hobby a profitable hobby."

"What does he collect?" asked Thorndyke.

"Everything," replied our visitor, flinging his hands apart with a comprehensive gesture—"everything that is precious and beautiful—pictures, ivories, jewels, watches, objects of art and vertu—everything. He is a Jew, and he has that passion for things that are rich and costly that has distinguished our race from the

time of my namesake Solomon onwards. His house in Howard Street, Piccadilly, is at once a museum and an art gallery. The rooms are filled with cases of gems, of antique jewellery, of coins and historic relics—some of priceless value—and the walls are covered with paintings, every one of which is a masterpiece. There is a fine collection of ancient weapons and armour, both European and Oriental; rare books, manuscripts, papyri, and valuable antiquities from Egypt, Assyria, Cyprus, and elsewhere. You see, his taste is quite catholic, and his knowledge of rare and curious things is probably greater than that of any other living man. He is never mistaken. No forgery deceives him, and hence the great prices that he obtains; for a work of art purchased from Isaac Löwe is a work certified as genuine beyond all cavil."

He paused to mop his face with a silk handkerchief, and then, with the same plaintive volubility, continued:

"My brother is unmarried. He lives for his collection, and he lives with it. The house is not a very large one, and the collection takes up most of it; but he keeps a suite of rooms for his own occupation, and has two servants—a man and wife—to look after him. The man, who is a retired police sergeant, acts as caretaker and watchman; the woman as housekeeper and cook, if required, but my brother lives largely at his club. And now I come to this present catastrophe."

He ran his fingers through his hair, took a deep breath, and continued:

"Yesterday morning Isaac started for Florence by way of Paris, but his route was not certain, and he

intended to break his journey at various points as circumstances determined. Before leaving, he put his collection in my charge, and it was arranged that I should occupy his rooms in his absence. Accordingly, I sent my things round and took possession.

"Now, Dr. Thorndyke, I am closely connected with the drama, and it is my custom to spend my evenings at my club, of which most of the members are actors. Consequently, I am rather late in my habits ; but last night I was earlier than usual in leaving my club, for I started for my brother's house before half-past twelve. I felt, as you may suppose, the responsibility of the great charge I had undertaken ; and you may, therefore, imagine my horror, my consternation, my despair, when, on letting myself in with my latchkey, I found a police-inspector, a sergeant, and a constable in the hall. There had been a robbery, sir, in my brief absence, and the account that the inspector gave of the affair was briefly this :

"While taking the round of his district, he had noticed an empty hansom proceeding in leisurely fashion along Howard Street. There was nothing remarkable in this, but when, about ten minutes later, he was returning, and met a hansom, which he believed to be the same, proceeding along the same street in the same direction, and at the same easy pace, the circumstance struck him as odd, and he made a note of the number of the cab in his pocket-book. It was 72,863, and the time was 11.35.

"At 11.45 a constable coming up Howard Street noticed a hansom standing opposite the door of my brother's house, and, while he was looking at it, a man came out of the house carrying something, which

he put in the cab. On this the constable quickened his pace, and when the man returned to the house and re-appeared carrying what looked like a portmanteau, and closing the door softly behind him, the policeman's suspicions were aroused, and he hurried forward, hailing the cabman to stop.

"The man put his burden into the cab, and sprang in himself. The cabman lashed his horse, which started off at a gallop and the policeman broke into a run, blowing his whistle, and flashing his lantern on to the cab. He followed it round the two turnings into Albemarle Street, and was just in time to see it turn into Piccadilly, where, of course, it was lost. However, he managed to note the number of the cab, which was 72,863, and he describes the man as short and thick-set, and thinks he was not wearing any hat.

"As he was returning, he met the inspector and the sergeant, who had heard the whistle, and on his report the three officers hurried to the house, where they knocked and rang for some minutes without any result. Being now more than suspicious, they went to the back of the house, through the mews, where, with great difficulty, they managed to force a window and effect an entrance into the house.

"Here their suspicions were soon changed to certainty, for, on reaching the first-floor, they heard strange muffled groans proceeding from one of the rooms, the door of which was locked, though the key had not been removed. They opened the door, and found the caretaker and his wife sitting on the floor, with their backs against the wall. Both were bound hand and foot, and the head of each was enveloped in a green-baize bag; and when the bags were

taken off, each was found to be lightly but effectively gagged.

"Each told the same story. The caretaker, fancying he heard a noise, armed himself with a truncheon, and came downstairs to the first-floor, where he found the door of one of the rooms open, and a light burning inside. He stepped on tiptoe to the open door, and was peering in, when he was seized from behind, half suffocated by a pad held over his mouth, pinioned, gagged, and blindfolded with the bag.

"His assailant—whom he never saw—was amazingly strong and skilful, and handled him with perfect ease, although he—the caretaker—is a powerful man, and a good boxer and wrestler. The same thing happened to the wife, who had come down to look for her husband. She walked into the same trap, and was gagged, pinioned, and blindfolded without ever having seen the robber. So the only description that we have of this villain is that furnished by the constable."

"And the caretaker had no chance of using his truncheon?" said Thorndyke.

"Well, he got in one backhanded blow over his right shoulder, which he thinks caught the burglar in the face; but the fellow caught him by the elbow, and gave his arm such a twist that he dropped the truncheon on the floor."

"Is the robbery a very extensive one?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Löwe, "that is just what we cannot say. But I fear it is. It seems that my brother had quite recently drawn out of his bank four thousand pounds in notes and gold. These little transactions are often carried out in cash rather than by cheque."

here I caught a twinkle in Thorndyke's eye—"and the caretaker says that a few days ago Isaac brought home several parcels, which were put away temporarily in a strong cupboard. He seemed to be very pleased with his new acquisitions, and gave the caretaker to understand that they were of extraordinary rarity and value.

"Now, this cupboard has been cleared out. Not a vestige is left in it but the wrappings of the parcels, so, although nothing else has been touched, it is pretty clear that goods to the value of four thousand pounds have been taken; but when we consider what an excellent buyer my brother is, it becomes highly probable that the actual value of those things is two or three times that amount, or even more. It is a dreadful, dreadful business, and Isaac will hold me responsible for it all."

"Is there no further clue?" asked Thorndyke. "What about the cab, for instance?"

"Oh, the cab," groaned Löwe—"that clue failed. The police must have mistaken the number. They telephoned immediately to all the police stations, and a watch was set, with the result that number 72,863 was stopped as it was going home for the night. But it then turned out that the cab had not been off the rank since eleven o'clock, and the driver had been in the shelter all the time with several other men. But there is a clue; I have it here."

Mr. Löwe's face brightened for once as he reached out for the bandbox.

"The houses in Howard Street," he explained, as he untied the fastening, "have small balconies to the first-floor windows at the back. Now, the thief entered by

one of these windows, having climbed up a rain-water pipe to the balcony. It was a gusty night, as you will remember, and this morning, as I was leaving the house, the butler next door called to me and gave me this; he had found it lying in the balcony of his house."

He opened the bandbox with a flourish, and brought forth a rather shabby billycock hat.

"I understand," said he, "that by examining a hat it is possible to deduce from it, not only the bodily characteristics of the wearer, but also his mental and moral qualities, his state of health, his pecuniary position, his past history, and even his domestic relations and the peculiarities of his place of abode. Am I right in this supposition?"

The ghost of a smile flitted across Thorndyke's face as he laid the hat upon the remains of the newspaper. "We must not expect too much," he observed. "Hats, as you know, have a way of changing owners. Your own hat, for instance" (a very spruce, hard felt), "is a new one, I think."

"Got it last week," said Mr. Löwe.

"Exactly. It is an expensive hat, by Lincoln and Bennett, and I see you have judiciously written your name in indelible marking-ink on the lining. Now, a new hat suggests a discarded predecessor. What do you do with your old hats?"

"My man has them, but they don't fit him. I suppose he sells them or gives them away."

"Very well. Now, a good hat like yours has a long life, and remains serviceable long after it has become shabby; and the probability is that many of your hats pass from owner to owner; from you to the shabby-

genteel, and from them to the shabby ungentleel. And it is a fair assumption that there are, at this moment, an appreciable number of tramps and casuals wearing hats by Lincoln and Bennett, marked in indelible ink with the name S. Löwe; and anyone who should examine those hats, as you suggest, might draw some very misleading deductions as to the personal habits of S. Löwe."

Mr. Marchmont chuckled audibly, and then, remembering the gravity of the occasion, suddenly became portentously solemn.

"So you think that the hat is of no use, after all?" said Mr. Löwe, in a tone of deep disappointment.

"I won't say that," replied Thorndyke. "We may learn something from it. Leave it with me, at any rate; but you must let the police know that I have it. They will want to see it, of course."

"And you will try to get those things, won't you?" pleaded Löwe.

"I will think over the case. But you understand, or Mr. Marchmont does, that this is hardly in my province. I am a medical jurist, and this is not a medico-legal case."

"Just what I told him," said Marchmont. "But you will do me a great kindness if you will look into the matter. Make it a medico-legal case," he added persuasively.

Thorndyke repeated his promise, and the two men took their departure.

For some time after they had left, my colleague remained silent, regarding the hat with a quizzical smile. "It is like a game of forfeits," he remarked

at length, "and we have to find the owner of 'this very pretty thing.'" He lifted it with a pair of forceps into a better light, and began to look at it more closely.

"Perhaps," said he, "we have done Mr. Löwe an injustice, after all. This is certainly a very remarkable hat."

"It is as round as a basin," I exclaimed. "Why, the fellow's head must have been turned in a lathe!"

Thorndyke laughed. "The point," said he, "is this. This is a hard hat, and so must have fitted fairly, or it could not have been worn; and it was a cheap hat, and so was not made to measure. But a man with a head that shape has got to come to a clear understanding with his hat. No ordinary hat would go on at all.

"Now, you see what he has done—no doubt on the advice of some friendly hatter. He has bought a hat of a suitable size, and he has made it hot—probably steamed it. Then he has jammed it, while still hot and soft, on to his head, and allowed it to cool and set before removing it. That is evident from the distortion of the brim. The important corollary is, that this hat fits his head exactly—is, in fact, a perfect mould of it; and this fact, together with the cheap quality of the hat, furnishes the further corollary that it has probably only had a single owner.

"And now let us turn it over and look at the outside. You notice at once the absence of old dust. Allowing for the circumstance that it had been out all night, it is decidedly clean. Its owner has been in the habit of brushing it, and is therefore presumably a

decent, orderly man. But if you look at it in a good light, you see a kind of bloom on the felt, and through this lens you can make out particles of a fine white powder which has worked into the surface."

He handed me his lens, through which I could distinctly see the particles to which he referred.

"Then," he continued, "under the curl of the brim and in the folds of the hatband, where the brush has not been able to reach it, the powder has collected quite thickly, and we can see that it is a very fine powder, and very white, like flour. What do you make of that?"

"I should say that it is connected with some industry. He may be engaged in some factory or works, or, at any rate, may live near a factory, and have to pass it frequently."

"Yes; and I think we can distinguish between the two possibilities. For, if he only passes the factory, the dust will be on the outside of the hat only; the inside will be protected by his head. But if he is engaged in the works, the dust will be inside, too, as the hat will hang on a peg in the dust-laden atmosphere, and his head will also be powdered, and so convey the dust to the inside."

He turned the hat over once more, and as I brought the powerful lens to bear upon the dark lining, I could clearly distinguish a number of white particles in the interstices of the fabric.

"The powder is on the inside, too," I said.

He took the lens from me, and, having verified my statement, proceeded with the examination. "You notice," he said, "that the leather head-lining is stained with grease, and this staining is more pro-

nounced at the sides and back. His hair, therefore, is naturally greasy, or he greases it artificially; for if the staining were caused by perspiration, it would be most marked opposite the forehead."

He peered anxiously into the interior of the hat, and eventually turned down the head-lining; and immediately there broke out upon his face a gleam of satisfaction.

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "This is a stroke of luck. I was afraid our neat and orderly friend had defeated us with his brush. Pass me the small dissecting forceps, Jervis."

I handed him the instrument, and he proceeded to pick out daintily from the space behind the head-lining some half a dozen short pieces of hair, which he laid, with infinite tenderness, on a sheet of white paper.

"There are several more on the other side," I said, pointing them out to him.

"Yes, but we must leave some for the police," he answered, with a smile. "They must have the same chance as ourselves, you know."

"But surely," I said, as I bent down over the paper, "these are pieces of horsehair!"

"I think not," he replied; "but the microscope will show. At any rate, this is the kind of hair I should expect to find with a head of that shape."

"Well, it is extraordinarily coarse," said I, "and two of the hairs are nearly white."

"Yes; black hairs beginning to turn grey. And now, as our preliminary survey has given such encouraging results, we will proceed to more exact

methods; and we must waste no time, for we shall have the police here presently to rob us of our treasure."

He folded up carefully the paper containing the hairs, and taking the hat in both hands, as though it were some sacred vessel, ascended with me to the laboratory on the next floor.

"Now, Polton," he said to his laboratory assistant, "we have here a specimen for examination, and time is precious. First of all, we want your patent dust-extractor." *An instrument for taking out dust*

The little man bustled to a cupboard and brought forth a singular ^{instrument} appliance, of his own manufacture, somewhat like a miniature vacuum cleaner. It had been made from a bicycle foot-pump, by reversing the piston-valve, and was fitted with a glass nozzle and a small detachable glass receiver for collecting the dust, at the end of a flexible metal tube.

"We will sample the dust from the outside first," said Thorndyke, laying the hat upon the work-bench. "Are you ready, Polton?"

The assistant slipped his foot into the stirrup of the pump and worked the handle vigorously, while Thorndyke drew the glass nozzle slowly along the hat-brim under the curled edge. And as the nozzle passed along, the white coating vanished as if by magic, leaving the felt absolutely clean and black, and simultaneously the glass receiver became clouded over with a white deposit.

"We will leave the other side for the police," said Thorndyke, and as Polton ceased pumping he detached the receiver, and laid it on a sheet of paper, on which he wrote in pencil, "Outside," and covered it with a

small bell-glass. A fresh receiver having been fitted on, the nozzle was now drawn over the silk lining of the hat, and then through the space behind the leather head-lining on one side; and now the dust that collected in the receiver was much of the usual grey colour and fluffy texture, and included two more hairs.

“And now,” said Thorndyke, when the second receiver had been detached and set aside, “we want a mould of the inside of the hat, and we must make it by the quickest method; there is no time to make a paper mould. It is a most astonishing head,” he added, reaching down from a nail a pair of large callipers, which he applied to the inside of the hat; “six inches and nine-tenths long by six and six-tenths broad, which gives us”—he made a rapid calculation on a scrap of paper—“the extraordinarily high cephalic index of 95.6.”

Polton now took possession of the hat, and, having stuck a band of wet tissue-paper round the inside, mixed a small bowl of plaster-of-Paris, and very dexterously ran a stream of the thick liquid on to the tissue-paper, where it quickly solidified. A second and third application resulted in a broad ring of solid plaster an inch thick, forming a perfect mould of the inside of the hat, and in a few minutes the slight contraction of the plaster in setting rendered the mould sufficiently loose to allow of its being slipped out on to a board to dry.

We were none too soon, for even as Polton was removing the mould, the electric bell, which I had switched on to the laboratory, announced a visitor, and when I went down I found a police-sergeant

waiting with a note from Superintendent Miller, requesting the immediate transfer of the hat.

"The next thing to be done," said Thorndyke, when the sergeant had departed with the bandbox, "is to measure the thickness of the hairs, and make a transverse section of one, and examine the dust. The section we will leave to Polton—as time is an object. Polton, you had better imbed the hair in thick gum, and freeze it hard on the microtome, and be very careful to cut the section at right angles to the length of the hair—meanwhile, we will get to work with the microscope."

The hairs proved on measurement to have the surprisingly large diameter of $\frac{1}{133}$ of an inch—fully double that of ordinary hairs, although they were unquestionably human. As to the white dust, it presented a problem that even Thorndyke was unable to solve. The application of reagents showed it to be carbonate of lime, but its source for a time remained a mystery.

"The larger particles," said Thorndyke, with his eye applied to the microscope, "appear to be transparent, crystalline, and distinctly laminated in structure. It is not chalk, it is not whiting, it is not any kind of cement. What can it be?"

"Could it be any kind of shell?" I suggested. "For instance——"

"Of course!" he exclaimed, starting up; "you have hit it, Jervis, as you always do. It must be mother-of-pearl. Polton, give me a pearl shirt-button out of your oddments box."

The button was duly produced by the thrifty Polton, dropped into an agate mortar, and speedily reduced to

powder, a tiny pinch of which Thorndyke placed under the microscope.

"This powder," said he, "is, naturally, much coarser than our specimen, but the identity of character is unmistakable. Jervis, you are a treasure. Just look at it."

I glanced down the microscope, and then pulled out my watch. "Yes," I said, "there is no doubt about it, I think; but I must be off. Anstey urged me to be in court by 11.30 at the latest."


With infinite reluctance I collected my notes and papers and departed, leaving Thorndyke diligently copying addresses out of the Post Office Directory.

My business at the court detained me the whole of the day, and it was near upon dinner-time when I reached our chambers. Thorndyke had not yet come in, but he arrived half an hour later, tired and hungry, and not very communicative.

"What have I done?" he repeated, in answer to my inquiries. "I have walked miles of dirty pavement, and I have visited every pearl-shell cutter's in London, with one exception, and I have not found what I was looking for. The one mother-of-pearl factory that remains, however, is the most likely, and I propose to look in there to-morrow morning. Meanwhile, we have completed our data, with Polton's assistance. Here is a tracing of our friend's skull taken from the mould; you see it is an extreme type of brachycephalic skull, and markedly unsymmetrical. Here is a transverse section of his hair, which is quite circular—unlike yours or mine, which would be oval. We have the mother-of-pearl dust from the outside of the hat, and from the inside similar dust mixed with

various fibres and a few granules of rice starch. Those are our data."

"Supposing the hat should not be that of the burglar after all?" I suggested.

"That would be annoying. But I think it is his, and I think I can guess at the nature of the art treasures that were stolen." 

"And you don't intend to enlighten me?"

"My dear fellow," he replied, "you have all the data. Enlighten yourself by the exercise of your own brilliant faculties. Don't give way to mental indolence."

I endeavoured, from the facts in my possession, to construct the personality of the mysterious burglar, and failed utterly; nor was I more successful in my endeavour to guess at the nature of the stolen property; and it was not until the following morning, when we had set out on our quest and were approaching Limehouse, that Thorndyke would revert to the subject.

"We are now," he said, "going to the factory of Badcomb and Martin, shell importers and cutters, in the West India Dock Road. If I don't find my man there, I shall hand the facts over to the police, and waste no more time over the case."

"What is your man like?" I asked.

"I am looking for an elderly Japanese, wearing a new hat or, more probably, a cap, and having a bruise on his right cheek or temple. I am also looking for a cab-yard; but here we are at the works, and as it is now close on the dinner-hour, we will wait and see the hands come out before making any inquiries."

We walked slowly past the tall, blank-faced building,

and were just turning to re-pass it when a steam whistle sounded, a wicket opened in the main gate, and a stream of workmen—each powdered with white, like a miller—emerged into the street. We halted to watch the men as they came out, one by one, through the wicket, and turned to the right or left towards their homes or some adjacent coffee-shop; but none of them answered to the description that my friend had given.

The outcoming stream grew thinner, and at length ceased; the wicket was shut with a bang, and once more Thorndyke's quest appeared to have failed.

"Is that all of them, I wonder?" he said, with a shade of disappointment in his tone; but even as he spoke the wicket opened again, and a leg protruded. The leg was followed by a back and a curious globular head, covered with iron-grey hair, and surmounted by a cloth cap, the whole appertaining to a short, very thick-set man, who remained thus, evidently talking to someone inside.

Suddenly he turned his head to look across the street; and immediately I recognized, by the pallid yellow complexion and narrow eye-slits, the physiognomy of a typical Japanese. The man remained talking for nearly another minute; then, drawing out his other leg, he turned towards us; and now I perceived that the right side of his face, over the prominent cheek-bone, was discoloured as though by a severe bruise.

"Ha!" said Thorndyke, turning round sharply as the man approached, "either this is our man or it is an incredible coincidence." He walked away at a moderate pace, allowing the Japanese to overtake us

slowly, and when the man had at length passed us, he increased his speed somewhat, so as to maintain the distance.

Our friend stepped along briskly, and presently turned up a side street, whither we followed at a respectful distance, Thorndyke holding open his pocket-book, and appearing to engage me in an earnest discussion; but keeping a sharp eye on his quarry.

"There he goes!" said my colleague, as the man suddenly disappeared—"the house with the green window-sashes. That will be number thirteen."

It was; and, having verified the fact, we passed on, and took the next turning that would lead us back to the main road.

Some twenty minutes later, as we were strolling past the door of a coffee-shop, a man came out, and began to fill his pipe with an air of leisurely satisfaction. His hat and clothes were powdered with white like those of the workmen whom we had seen come out of the factory. Thorndyke accosted him.

"Is that a flour-mill up the road there?"

"No, sir; pearl-shell. I work there myself."

"Pearl-shell, eh?" said Thorndyke. "I suppose that will be an industry that will tend to attract the aliens. Do you find it so?"

"No, sir; not at all. The work's too hard. We've only got one foreigner in the place, and he ain't an alien—he's a Jap."

"A Jap!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "Really. Now, I wonder if that would chance to be our old friend Kotei—you remember Kotei?" he added, turning to me.

"No, sir; this man's name is Futashima. There was another Jap in the works, a chap named Itu, a pal of Futashima's, but he's left."

"Ah! I don't know either of them. By the way, usen't there to be a cab-yard just about here?"

"There's a yard up Rankin Street where they keep vans and one or two cabs. That chap Itu works there now. Taken to horseflesh. Drives a van sometimes. Queer start for a Jap."

"Very." Thorndyke thanked the man for his information, and we sauntered on towards Rankin Street. The yard was at this time nearly deserted, being occupied only by an ancient and crazy four-wheeler and a very shabby hansom.

"Curious old houses, these that back on to the yard," said Thorndyke, strolling into the enclosure. "That timber gable, now," pointing to a house, from a window of which a man was watching us suspiciously, "is quite an interesting survival."

"What's your business, mister?" demanded the man in a gruff tone.

"We are just having a look at these quaint old houses," replied Thorndyke, edging towards the back of the hansom, and opening his pocket-book, as though to make a sketch.

"Well, you can see 'em from outside," said the man.

"So we can," said Thorndyke suavely, "but not so well, you know."

At this moment the pocket-book slipped from his hand and fell, scattering a number of loose papers about the ground under the hansom, and our friend at the window laughed joyously.

"No hurry," murmured Thorndyke, as I stooped to help him to gather up the papers—which he did in the most surprisingly slow and clumsy manner. "It is fortunate that the ground is dry." He stood up with the rescued papers in his hand, and, having scribbled down a brief note, slipped the book in his pocket.

"Now you'd better mizzle," observed the man at the window.

"Thank you," replied Thorndyke, "I think we had;" and, with a pleasant nod at the custodian, he proceeded to adopt the hospitable suggestion.

"Mr. Marchmont has been here, sir, with Inspector Badger and another gentleman," said Polton, as we entered our chambers. "They said they would call again about five."

"Then," replied Thorndyke, "as it is now a quarter to five, there is just time for us to have a wash while you get the tea ready. The particles that float in the atmosphere of Limehouse are not all mother-of-pearl."

Our visitors arrived punctually, the third gentleman being, as we had supposed, Mr. Solomon Löwe. Inspector Badger I had not seen before, and he now impressed me as showing a tendency to invert the significance of his own name by endeavouring to "draw" Thorndyke; in which, however, he was not brilliantly successful.

"I hope you are not going to disappoint Mr. Löwe, sir," he commenced facetiously. "You have had a good look at that hat—we saw your marks on it—and he expects that you will be able to point us out the

man, name and address all complete." He grinned patronizingly at our unfortunate client, who was looking even more haggard and worn than he had been on the previous morning.

"Have you—have you made any—discovery?" Mr. Löwe asked with pathetic eagerness.

"We examined the hat very carefully, and I think we have established a few facts of some interest."

"Did your examination of the hat furnish any information as to the nature of the stolen property, sir?" inquired the humorous inspector.

Thorndyke turned to the officer with a face as expressionless as a wooden mask.

"We thought it possible," said he, "that it might consist of works of Japanese art, such as netsukes, paintings, and such like."

Mr. Löwe uttered an exclamation of delighted astonishment, and the facetiousness—faded rather suddenly from the inspector's countenance.

"I don't know how you can have found out," said he. "We have only known it half an hour ourselves, and the wire came direct from Florence to Scotland Yard."

"Perhaps you can describe the thief to us," said Mr. Löwe, in the same eager tone.

"I dare say the inspector can do that," replied Thorndyke.

"Yes, I think so," replied the officer. "He is a short strong man, with a dark complexion and hair turning grey. He has a very round head, and he is probably a workman engaged at some whiting or cement works. That is all we know; if you

can tell us any more, sir, we shall be very glad to hear it."

"I can only offer a few suggestions," said Thorn-dyke, "but perhaps you may find them useful. For instance, at 13, Birket Street, Limehouse, there is living a Japanese gentleman named Futashima, who works at Badcomb and Martin's mother-of-pearl factory. I think that if you were to call on him, and let him try on the hat that you have, it would probably fit him."

The inspector scribbled ravenously in his notebook, and Mr. Marchmont—an old admirer of Thorndyke's—leaned back in his chair, chuckling softly and rubbing his hands.

"Then," continued my colleague, "there is in Rankin Street, Limehouse, a cab-yard, where another Japanese gentleman named Itu is employed. You might find out where Itu was the night before last; and if you should chance to see a hansom cab there—number 22,481—have a good look at it. In the frame of the number-plate you will find six small holes. Those holes may have held brads, and the brads may have held a false number card. At any rate, you might ascertain where that cab was at 11.30 the night before last. That is all I have to suggest."

Mr. Löwe leaped from his chair. "Let us go—now—at once—there is no time to be lost. A thousand thanks to you, doctor—a thousand million thanks. Come!"

He seized the inspector by the arm and forcibly dragged him towards the door, and a few moments later we heard the footsteps of our visitors clattering down the stairs.

"It was not worth while to enter into explanations with them," said Thorndyke, as the footsteps died away—"nor perhaps with you?"

"On the contrary," I replied, "I am waiting to be fully enlightened."

"Well, then, my inferences in this case were perfectly simple ones, drawn from well-known anthropological facts. The human race, as you know, is, roughly, divided into three groups—the black, the white, and the yellow races. But apart from the variable quality of colour, these races have certain fixed characteristics associated especially with the shape of the skull, of the eye-sockets, and the hair.

"Thus in the black races the skull is long and narrow, the eye-sockets are long and narrow, and the hair is flat and ribbon-like, and usually coiled up like a watch-spring. In the white races the skull is oval, the eye-sockets are oval, and the hair is slightly flattened or oval in section, and tends to be wavy; while in the yellow or Mongol races, the skull is short and round, the eye-sockets are short and round, and the hair is straight and circular in section. So that we have, in the black races, long skull, long orbits, flat hair; in the white races, oval skull, oval orbits, oval hair; and in the yellow races, round skull, round orbits, round hair.

"Now, in this case we had to deal with a very short round skull. But you cannot argue from races to individuals; there are many short-skulled Englishmen. But when I found, associated with that skull, hairs which were circular in section, it became practically certain that the individual was a Mongol of some kind. The mother-of-pearl dust and the granules of rice

starch from the inside of the hat favoured this view, for the pearl-shell industry is specially connected with China and Japan, while starch granules from the hat of an Englishman would probably be wheat starch.

"Then as to the hair: it was, as I mentioned to you, circular in section, and of very large diameter. Now, I have examined many thousands of hairs, and the thickest that I have ever seen came from the heads of Japanese; but the hairs from this hat were as thick as any of them. But the hypothesis that the burglar was a Japanese received confirmation in various ways. Thus, he was short, though strong and active, and the Japanese are the shortest of the Mongol races, and very strong and active.

"Then his remarkable skill in handling the powerful caretaker—a retired police-sergeant—suggested the Japanese art of ju-jitsu, while the nature of the robbery was consistent with the value set by the Japanese on works of art. Finally, the fact that only a particular collection was taken, suggested a special, and probably national, character in the things stolen, while their portability—you will remember that goods of the value of from eight to twelve thousand pounds were taken away in two hand-packages—was much more consistent with Japanese than Chinese works, of which the latter tend rather to be bulky and ponderous. Still, it was nothing but a bare hypothesis until we had seen Futashima—and, indeed, is no more now. I may, after all, be entirely mistaken."

He was not, however; and at this moment there reposes in my drawing-room an ancient netsuke, which came as a thank-offering from Mr. Isaac Löwe on the

recovery of the booty from a back room in No. 13, Birket Street, Limehouse. The treasure, of course, was given in the first place to Thorndyke, but transferred by him to my wife on the pretence that but for my suggestion of shell-dust the robber would never have been traced. Which is, on the face of it, preposterous.

From "John Thorndyke's Cases."

III

THE STOLEN INGOTS

R. AUSTIN FREEMAN

“**I**N medico-legal practice,” Thorndyke remarked, “one must be constantly on one’s guard against the effects of suggestion, whether intentional or unconscious. When the facts of a case are set forth by an informant, they are nearly always presented, consciously or unconsciously, in terms of inference. Certain facts, which appear to the narrator to be the leading facts, are given with emphasis and in detail, while other facts, which appear to be subordinate or trivial, are partially suppressed. But this assessment of evidential value must never be accepted. The whole case must be considered and each fact weighed separately, and then it will commonly happen that the leading fact turns out to be the one that had been passed over as negligible.”

The remark was made apropos of a case the facts of which had just been stated to us by Mr. Halethorpe, of the Sphinx Assurance Company. I did not quite perceive its bearing at the time, but looking back when the case was concluded, I realised that I had fallen into the very error against which Thorndyke’s warning should have guarded me.

“I trust,” said Mr. Halethorpe, “that I have not come at an inconvenient time. You are so tolerant of unusual hours——”

“My practice,” interrupted Thorndyke, “is my

recreation, and I welcome you as one who comes to furnish entertainment. Draw your chair up to the fire, light a cigar and tell us your story."

Mr. Halethorpe laughed, but adopted the procedure suggested, and having settled his toes upon the kerb and selected a cigar from the box, he opened the subject of his call.

"I don't quite know what you can do for us," he began, "as it is hardly your business to trace lost property, but I thought I would come and let you know about our difficulty. The fact is that our company looks like dropping some four thousand pounds, which the directors won't like. What has happened is this:

"About two months ago the London House of the Akropong Gold Fields Company applied to us to insure a parcel of gold bars that were to be consigned to Minton and Borwell, the big manufacturing jewellers. The bars were to be shipped at Accra and landed at Bellhaven, which is the nearest port to Minton and Borwell's works. Well, we agreed to underwrite the risk—we have done business with the Akropong people before—and the matter was settled. The bars were put on board the *Labadi* at Accra, and in due course were landed at Bellhaven, where they were delivered to Minton's agents. So far, so good. Then came the catastrophe. The case of bars was put on the train at Bellhaven, consigned to Anchester, where Minton's have their factory. But the line doesn't go to Anchester direct. The junction is at Garbridge, a small country station close to the river Crouch, and here the case was put out and locked up in the station-master's office to wait for the Anchester train. It seems that the

station-master was called away and detained longer than he had expected, and when the train was signalled he hurried back in a mighty twitter. However, the case was there all right, and he personally superintended its removal to the guard's van and put it in the guard's charge. All went well for the rest of the journey. A member of the firm was waiting at Anchester station with a closed van. The case was put into it and taken direct to the factory, where it was opened in the private office—and found to be full of lead pipe."

"I presume," said Thorndyke, "that it was not the original case."

"No," replied Halethorpe, "but it was a very fair imitation. The label and the marks were correct, but the seals were just plain wax. Evidently the exchange had been made in the station-master's office, and it transpires that although the door was securely locked, there was an unfastened window which opened on to the garden, and there were plain marks of feet on the flower-bed outside."

"What time did this happen?" asked Thorndyke.

"The Anchester train came in at a quarter past seven, by which time, of course, it was quite dark."

"And when did it happen?"

"The day before yesterday. We heard of it yesterday morning."

"Are you contesting the claim?"

"We don't want to. Of course, we could plead negligence, but in that case I think we should make a claim on the railway company. But, naturally, we should much rather recover the property. After all, it can't be so very far away."

"I wouldn't say that," said Thorndyke. "This was

no impromptu theft. The dummy case was prepared in advance, and evidently by somebody who knew what the real case was like, and how and when it was to be despatched from Bellhaven. We must assume that the disposal of the stolen case has been provided for with similar completeness. How far is Garbridge from the river?"

"Less than half a mile across the marshes. The detective-inspector—Badger, I think you know him—asked the same question."

"Naturally," said Thorndyke. "A heavy object like this case is much more easily and inconspicuously conveyed by water than on land. And then, see what facilities for concealment a navigable river offers. The case could be easily stowed away on a small craft, or even in a boat; or the bars could be taken out and stowed amongst the ballast, or even, at a pinch, dropped overboard at a marked spot and left until the hue and cry was over."

"You are not very encouraging," Halethorpe remarked gloomily. "I take it that you don't much expect that we shall recover those bars."

"We needn't despair," was the reply, "but I want you to understand the difficulties. The thieves have got away with the booty, and that booty is an imperishable material which retains its value even if broken up into unrecognisable fragments. Melted down into small ingots, it would be impossible to identify."

"Well," said Halethorpe, "the police have the matter in hand—Inspector Badger, of the C.I.D., is in charge of the case—but our directors would be more satisfied if you would look into it. Of course we

would give you any help we could. What do you say?"

"I am willing to look into the case," said Thorndyke, "though I don't hold out much hope. Could you give me a note to the shipping company and another to the consignees, Minton and Borwell?"

"Of course I will. I'll write them now. I have some of our stationery in my attaché case. But, if you will pardon my saying so, you seem to be starting your inquiry just where there is nothing to be learned. The case was stolen after it left the ship and before it reached the consignees—although their agent had received it from the ship."

"The point is," said Thorndyke, "that this was a pre-concerted robbery, and that the thieves possessed special information. That information must have come either from the ship or from the factory. So, while we must try to pick up the track of the case itself, we must seek the beginning of the clue at the two ends—the ship and the factory—from one of which it must have started."

"Yes, that's true," said Halethorpe. "Well, I'll write those two notes and then I must run away; and we'll hope for the best."

He wrote the two letters, asking for facilities from the respective parties, and then took his departure in a somewhat chastened frame of mind.

"Quite an interesting little problem," Thorndyke remarked, as Halethorpe's footsteps died away on the stairs, "but not much in our line. It is really a police case—a case for patient and intelligent inquiry. And that is what we shall have to do—make some careful inquiries on the spot."

"Where do you propose to begin?" I asked.

"At the beginning," he replied. "Bellhaven. I propose that we go down there to-morrow morning and pick up the thread at that end."

"What thread?" I demanded. "We know that the package started from there. What else do you expect to learn?"

"There are several curious possibilities in this case, as you must have noticed," he replied. "The question is, whether any of them are probabilities. That is what I want to settle before we begin a detailed investigation."

"For my part," said I, "I should have supposed that the investigation would start from the scene of the robbery. But I presume that you have seen some possibilities that I have overlooked."

Which eventually turned out to be the case.

"I think," said Thorndyke as we alighted at Bellhaven on the following morning, "we had better go first to the Customs and make quite certain, if we can, that the bars were really in the case when it was delivered to the consignees' agents. It won't do to take it for granted that the substitution took place at Garbridge, although that is by far the most probable theory." Accordingly we made our way to the harbour, where an obliging mariner directed us to our destination.

At the Custom House we were received by a genial officer, who, when Thorndyke had explained his connection with the robbery, entered into the matter with complete sympathy and a quick grasp of the situation.

"I see," said he. "You want clear evidence that the bars were in the case when it left here. Well, I think we can satisfy you on that point. Bullion is not a customable commodity, but it has to be examined and reported. If it is consigned to the Bank of England or the Mint, the case is passed through with the seals unbroken, but as this was a private consignment, the seals will have been broken and the contents of the case examined. Jeffson, show these gentlemen the report on the case of gold bars from the *Labadi*."

"Would it be possible," Thorndyke asked, "for us to have a few words with the officer who opened the case? You know the legal partiality for personal testimony."

"—Of course it would. Jeffson, when these gentlemen have seen the report, find the officer who signed it and let them have a talk with him."

We followed Mr. Jeffson into an adjoining office, where he produced the report and handed it to Thorndyke. The particulars that it gave were in effect those that would be furnished by the ship's manifest and the bill of lading. The case was thirteen inches long by twelve wide and nine inches deep, outside measurement; and its gross weight was one hundred and seventeen pounds three ounces, and it contained four bars of the aggregate weight of one hundred and thirteen pounds two ounces.

"Thank you," said Thorndyke, handing back the report. "And now can we see the officer—Mr. Byrne, I think—just to fill in the details?"

"If you will come with me," replied Mr. Jeffson, "I'll find him for you. I expect he is on the wharf."

We followed our conductor out on to the quay among a litter of cases, crates and barrels, and eventually, amidst a battalion of Madeira wine casks, found the officer deep in problems of "content and ullage," and other customs mysteries. As Jeffson introduced us, and then discreetly retired, Mr. Byrne confronted us with a mahogany face and a truculent blue eye.

"With reference to this bullion," said Thorndyke, "I understand that you weighed the bars separately from the case?"

"Oi did," replied Mr. Byrne.

"Did you weigh each bar separately?"

"Oi did not," was the concise reply.

"What was the appearance of the bars—I mean as to shape and size? Were they of the usual type?"

"Oi've not had a great deal to do with bullion," said Mr. Byrne, "but Oi should say that they were just ordinary gold bars, about nine inches long by four wide and about two inches deep."

"Was there much packing material in the case?"

"Very little. The bars were wrapped in thick canvas and jammed into the case. There wouldn't be more than about half an inch clearance all round to allow for the canvas. The case was inch and a half stuff strengthened with iron bands."

"Did you seal the case after you had closed it up?"

"Oi did. 'Twas all shipshape when it was passed back to the mate. And Oi saw him hand it over to the consignees' agent; so 'twas all in order when it left the wharf."

"That was what I wanted to make sure of," said

Thorndyke; and, having pocketed his notebook and thanked the officer, he turned away among the wilderness of merchandise.

"So much for the Customs," said he. "I am glad we went there first. As you have no doubt observed, we have picked up some useful information."

"We have ascertained," I replied, "that the case was intact when it was handed over to the consignees' agents, so that our investigations at Garbridge will start from a solid basis. And that, I take it, is all you wanted to know."

"Not quite all," he rejoined. "There are one or two little details that I should like to fill in. I think we will look in on the shipping agents and present Halethorpe's note. We may as well learn all we can before we make our start from the scene of the robbery."

"Well," I said, "I don't see what more there is to learn here. But apparently you do. That seems to be the office, past those sheds."

The manager of the shipping agent's office looked us up and down as he sat at his littered desk with Halethorpe's letter in his hand.

"You've come about that bullion that was stolen," he said brusquely. "Well, it wasn't stolen here. Hadn't you better inquire at Garbridge, where it was?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Thorndyke. "But I am making certain preliminary inquiries. Now, first, as to the bill of lading, who has that—the original, I mean?"

"The captain has it at present, but I have a copy."

"Could I see it?" Thorndyke asked.

The manager raised his eyebrows protestingly, but produced the document from a file and handed it to Thorndyke, watching him inquisitively as he copied the particulars of the package into his notebook.

"I suppose," said Thorndyke as he returned the document, "you have a copy of the ship's manifest?"

"Yes," replied the manager, "but the entry in the manifest is merely a copy of the particulars given in the bill of lading."

"I should like to see the manifest, if it is not troubling you too much."

"But," the other protested impatiently, "the manifest contains no information respecting this parcel of bullion excepting the one entry, which, as I have told you, has been copied from the bill of lading."

"I realise that," said Thorndyke; "but I should like to look over it, all the same."

Our friend bounced into an inner office and presently returned with a voluminous document, which he slapped down on a side-table.

"There, sir," he said. "That is the manifest. This is the entry relating to the bullion that you are inquiring about. The rest of the document is concerned with the cargo, in which I presume you are not interested."

In this, however, he was mistaken; for Thorndyke, having verified the bullion entry, turned the leaves over and began systematically, though rapidly, to run his eye over the long list from the beginning, a proceeding that the manager viewed with frenzied impatience.

"If you are going to read it right through, sir," the latter observed, "I shall ask you to excuse me. Art is long but life is short," he added with a sour smile.

Nevertheless he hovered about uneasily, and when Thorndyke proceeded to copy some of the entries into his notebook, he craned over and read them without the least disguise, though not without comment. *criticism*

"Good God, sir!" he exclaimed. "What possible bearing on this robbery can that parcel of scrivelloes have? And do you realise that they are still in the ship's hold?" *possession*

"I inferred that they were, as they are consigned to London," Thorndyke replied, drawing his finger down the "description" column and rapidly scanning the entries in it. *examining* The manager watched that finger, and as it stopped successively at a bag of gum copal, a case of quartz specimens, a case of six-inch brass screw-bolts, a bag of beni-seed and a package of kola nuts, he breathed hard and muttered like an angry parrot. But Thorndyke was quite unmoved. With calm deliberation he copied out each entry, conscientiously noting the marks, descriptions of packages and contents, gross and net weight, dimensions, names of consignors and consignees, ports of shipment and discharge, and, in fact, the entire particulars. It was certainly an amazing proceeding, and I could make no more of it than could our impatient friend.

At last Thorndyke closed and pocketed his notebook, and the manager heaved a slightly obtrusive sigh. "Is there nothing more, sir?" he asked. "You don't want to examine the ship, for instance?" The next moment, I think, he regretted his sarcasm, for Thorn-

dyke inquired, with evident interest: "Is the ship still here?"

"Yes," was the unwilling admission. "She finishes unloading here at midday to-day and will probably haul into the London Docks to-morrow morning."

"I don't think I need go on board," said Thorndyke, "but you might give me a card in case I find that I want to."

The card was somewhat grudgingly produced, and when Thorndyke had thanked our entertainer for his help, we took our leave and made our way towards the station.

"Well," I said. "You have collected a vast amount of curious information, but I am hanged if I can see that any of it has the slightest bearing on our inquiry."

Thorndyke cast on me a look of deep reproach. "Jervis!" he exclaimed, "you astonish me; you do, indeed. Why, my dear fellow, it stares you in the face!"

"When you say 'it,'" I said a little irritably, "you mean——?"

"I mean the leading fact from which we may deduce the modus operandi of this robbery. You shall look over my notes in the train and sort out the data that we have collected. I think you will find them extremely illuminating."

"I doubt it," said I. "But, meanwhile, aren't we wasting a good deal of time? Halethorpe wants to get the gold back; he doesn't want to know how the thieves contrived to steal it."

"That is a very just remark," answered Thorndyke. "My learned friend displays his customary robust com-

His usual strong common sense

mon sense. Nevertheless, I think that a clear understanding of the mechanism of this robbery will prove very helpful to us, though I agree with you that we have spent enough time on securing our preliminary data. The important thing now is to pick up a trail ^{the} from Garbridge. But I see our train is signalled. We had better hurry."

As the train rumbled into the station, we looked out for an empty smoking compartment, and having been fortunate enough to secure one, we settled ourselves in opposite corners and lighted our pipes. Then Thorndyke handed me his notebook and as I studied, with wrinkled brows, the apparently disconnected entries, he sat and observed me thoughtfully and with the faintest suspicion of a smile. Again and again I read through those notes with ever-dwindling hopes of extracting the meaning that "stared me in the face." Vainly did I endeavour to connect gum copal, scriveloes or beni-seed with the methods of the unknown robbers. The entries in the notebook persisted obstinately in remaining totally disconnected and hopelessly irrelevant. At last I shut the book with a savage snap and handed it back to its owner.

"It's no use, Thorndyke," I said. "I can't see the faintest glimmer of light."

"Well," said he, "it isn't of much consequence. The practical part of our task is before us, and it may turn out a pretty difficult part. But we have got to recover those bars if it is humanly possible. And here we are at our jumping-off place. This is Garbridge Station—and I see an old acquaintance of ours on the platform."

I looked out, as the train slowed down, and there,

sure enough, was no less a person than Inspector Badger of the Criminal Investigation Department.

"We could have done very well without Badger," I remarked.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "but we shall have to take him into partnership, I expect. After all, we are on his territory and on the same errand. How do you do, Inspector?" he continued, as the officer, having observed our descent from the carriage, hurried forward with unwonted cordiality. *affection sincerely*

"I rather expected to see you here, sir," said he. "We heard that Mr. Halethorpe had consulted you. But this isn't the London train."

"No," said Thorndyke. "We've been to Bellhaven, just to make sure that the bullion was in the case when it started."

"I could have told you that two days ago," said Badger. "We got on to the Customs people at once. That was all plain sailing; but the rest of it isn't."

"No clue as to how the case was taken away?"

"Oh, yes; that is pretty clear. It was hoisted out, and the dummy hoisted in, through the window of the station-master's office. And the same night, two men were seen carrying a heavy package, about the size of the bullion-case, towards the marshes. But there the clue ends. The stuff seems to have vanished into thin air. Of course our people are on the look-out for it in various likely directions, but I am staying here with a couple of plain-clothes men. I've a conviction that it is still somewhere in this neighbourhood, and I mean to stick here in the hope that I may spot somebody trying to move it."

As the inspector was speaking we had been walking slowly from the station towards the village, which was on the opposite side of the river. On the bridge Thorndyke halted and looked down the river and over the wide expanse of marshy country.

"This is an ideal place for a bullion robbery," he remarked. "A tidal river near to the sea and a net-work of creeks, in any one of which one could hide a boat or sink the booty below tidemarks. Have you heard of any strange craft having put in here?"

"Yes. There's a little ^{sickly} ramshackle bawley from Leigh—but her crew of two ragamuffins are not Leigh men. And they've made a mess of their visit—got their craft on the mud on the top of the spring tide. There she is, on that spit; and there she'll be till next spring tide. But I've been over her carefully and I'll swear the stuff isn't aboard her. I had all the ballast out and emptied the lazarette and the chain locker."

"And what about the barge?"

"She's a regular trader here. Her crew—the ^{master: a small} skipper and his son—are quite respectable men and they belong here. There they go in that boat; I expect they are off on this tide. But they seem to be making for the bawley."

As he spoke the inspector produced a pair of glasses, through which he watched the movements of the barge's jolly-boat, and a couple of elderly fishermen, who were crossing the bridge, halted to look on. The barge's boat ran alongside the stranded bawley, and one of the ^{driving} rowers ^{also} hailed; whereupon two men tumbled up from the cabin and dropped into the boat, which immediately pushed off and headed for the barge.

moved

heaps "Them bawley blokes seems to be taking a passage along of old Bill Somers," one of the fishermen remarked, levelling a small telescope at the barge as the boat drew alongside and the four men climbed on board. "Going to work their passage, too," he added as the two passengers proceeded immediately to man the windlass while the crew let go the brails and hooked the main-sheet block to the traveller.

commented "Rum go," *remarked* commented Badger, glaring at the barge through his glasses; "but they haven't taken anything aboard with them. I could see that."

"You have overhauled the barge, I suppose?" said Thorndyke.

"Yes. Went right through her. Nothing there. She's light. There was no place aboard her where you could hide a split-pea."

"Did you get her anchor up?"

"No," replied Badger. "I didn't. I suppose I ought to have done so. However, they're getting it up themselves now." As he spoke, the rapid clink of a windlass-pawl was borne across the water, and through my prismatic glasses I could see the two passengers working for all they were worth at the cranks. Presently the clink of the pawl began to slow down somewhat and the two bargemen, having got the sails set, joined the toilers at the windlass, but even then there was no great increase of speed.

"Anchor seems to come up uncommon heavy," one of the fishermen remarked.

"Aye," the other agreed. "Got foul of an old mooring, maybe."

"Look out for the anchor, Badger," Thorndyke said in a low voice, gazing steadily through his binocular.

Abnelli

"It is out of the ground. ^{Strong rope} The cable is up and down and the barge is drifting off on the tide."

Even as he spoke the ring and stock of the anchor rose slowly out of the water, and now I could see that a second chain was shackled loosely to the cable, down ^{low} which it had slid until it was stopped by the ring of the anchor. Badger had evidently seen it too, for he ^{for} ejaculated, "Hallo!" and added a few verbal flourishes which I need not repeat. A few more turns of the windlass brought the flukes of the anchor clear of the water, and dangling against them was an undeniable ^{my} wooden case, securely slung with lashings of stout chain. Badger cursed volubly, and, turning to the fishermen, exclaimed, in a rather offensively peremptory tone: ~~may be~~

^{inner} "I want a boat. Now. This instant." The elder piscator regarded him doggedly and replied: "All right. I ain't got no objection."

"Where can I get a boat?" the inspector demanded, nearly purple with excitement and anxiety.

"Where do you think?" the mariner responded, evidently nettled by the inspector's masterful tone. "Pastrycook's? Or livery stables?"

"Look here," said Badger. "I'm a police officer and I want to board that barge, and I am prepared to pay handsomely. Now where can I get a boat?"

"We'll put you aboard of her," replied the fisherman, "that is, if we can catch her. But I doubt it. She's off, that's what she is. And there's something queer a-going on aboard of her," he added in a somewhat different tone.

There was. I had been observing it. The case had

been, with some difficulty, hoisted on board, and then suddenly there had broken out an altercation between the two bargees and their passengers, and this had now developed into what looked like a free fight. It was difficult to see exactly what was happening, for the barge was drifting rapidly down the river, and her sails, blowing out first on one side and then on the other, rather obscured the view. Presently, however, the sails filled and a man appeared at the wheel; then the barge jibbed round, and with a strong ebb tide and a fresh breeze, very soon began to grow small in the distance.

Meanwhile the fishermen had bustled off in search of a boat, and the inspector had raced to the bridge-head, where he stood gesticulating frantically and blowing his whistle, while Thorndyke continued placidly to watch the receding barge through his binocular. *What are we going to do?*

"What are we going to do?" I asked, a little surprised at my colleague's inaction.

"What can we do?" he asked in reply. "Badger will follow the barge. He probably won't overtake her, but he will prevent her from making a landing until they get out into the estuary, and then he may possibly get assistance. The chase is in his hands."

"Are we going with him?"

"I am not. This looks like being an all-night expedition, and I must be at our chambers to-morrow morning. Besides, the chase is not our affair. But if you would like to join Badger there is no reason why you shouldn't. I can look after the practice."

"Well," I said, "I think I should rather like to

be in at the death, if it won't inconvenience you. But it is possible that they may get away with the booty."

"Quite," he agreed; "and then it would be useful to know exactly how and where it disappears. Yes, go with them, by all means, and keep a sharp look-out."

At this moment Badger returned with the two plain-clothes men whom his whistle had called from their posts, and simultaneously a boat was seen approaching the steps by the bridge, rowed by the two fishermen. The inspector looked at us inquiringly. "Are you coming to see the sport?" he asked.

"Doctor Jervis would like to come with you," Thorndyke replied. "I have to get back to London. But you will be a fair boat-load without me."

This appeared to be also the view of the two fishermen, as they brought up at the steps and observed the four passengers; but they made no demur beyond inquiring if there were not any more; when we had taken our places in the stern sheets, they pushed off and pulled through the bridge and away down stream. Gradually, the village receded and the houses and the bridge grew small and more distant, though they remained visible for a long time over the marshy levels; and still, as I looked back through my glasses, I could see Thorndyke on the bridge watching the pursuit with his binocular to his eyes. his

Meanwhile the fugitive barge, having got some two miles start, seemed to be drawing ahead. But it was only at intervals that we could see her, for the tide was falling fast and we were mostly hemmed in by the high, muddy banks. Only when we entered a straight reach of the river could we see her sails over the land; and survive

every time that she came into view, she appeared perceptibly smaller.

When the river grew wider, the mast was stepped and a good-sized lug-sail hoisted, though one of the fishermen continued to ply his oar on the weather side, while the other took the tiller. This improved our pace appreciably; but still, whenever we caught a glimpse of the barge, it was evident that she was still gaining.

On one of these occasions the man at the tiller, standing up to get a better view, surveyed our quarry intently for nearly a minute and then addressed the inspector.

"She's a-going to give us the go-by, mister," he observed with conviction.

"Still gaining?" asked Badger.

"Aye. She's a-going to slip across the tail of Foulness Sand into the deep channel. And that's the last we shall see of her."

"But can't we get into the channel the same way?" demanded Badger.

"Well, d'ye see," replied the fisherman, "'tis like this. Tide's a-running out, but there'll be enough for her. It'll just carry her out through the Whitaker Channel and across the spit. Then it'll turn, and up she'll go, London way, on the flood. But we shall catch the flood-tide in the Whitaker Channel, and a rare old job we'll have to get out; and when we do get out, that barge'll be miles away."

The inspector swore long and earnestly. He even alluded to himself as a "blithering idiot." But that helped matters not at all. The fisherman's dismal prophecy was fulfilled in every horrid detail. When we

were approaching the Whitaker Channel the barge was just crossing the spit, and the last of the ebb-tide was trickling out. By the time we were fairly in the channel the tide had turned and was already flowing in with a speed that increased every minute; while over the sand we could see the barge, already out in the open estuary, heading to the west on the flood-tide at a good six knots.

Poor Badger was frantic. With yearning eyes fixed on the dwindling barge, he cursed, entreated, encouraged and made extravagant offers. He even took an oar and pulled with such desperate energy that he caught a crab and turned a neat back somersault into the fisherman's lap. The two mariners pulled until their oars bent like canes; but still the sandy banks crept by, inch by inch, and ever the turbid water seemed to pour up the channel more and yet more swiftly. It was a fearful struggle and seemed to last for hours; and when, at last, the boat crawled out across the spit and the exhausted rowers rested on their oars, the sun was just setting and the barge had disappeared into the west.

I was really sorry for Badger. His oversight in respect of the anchor was a very natural one for a landsman, and he had evidently taken infinite pains over the case and shown excellent judgment in keeping a close watch on the neighbourhood of Garbridge; and now, after all his care, it looked as if both the robbers and their booty had slipped through his fingers. It was desperately bad luck.

"Well," said the elder fisherman, "they've give us a run for our money; but they've got clear away. What's to be done now, mister?"

Badger had nothing to suggest excepting that we should pull or sail up the river in the hope of getting some assistance on the way. He was in the lowest depths of despair and dejection. But now, when Fortune seemed to have deserted us utterly, and failure appeared to be an accomplished fact, Providence intervened.

A small steam vessel that had been approaching from the direction of the East Swin suddenly altered her course and bore down as if to speak us. The fisherman who had last spoken looked at her attentively for a few moments and then slapped his thigh. "Saved, by gum!" he exclaimed. "This'll do your trick, master. Here comes a Customs cruiser."

Instantly the two fishermen bent to their oars to meet the oncoming craft, and in a few minutes we were alongside, Badger hailing like a bull of Bashan. A brief explanation to the officer in charge secured a highly sympathetic promise of help. We all scrambled up on deck; the boat was dropped astern at the scope of her painter; the engine-room bell jangled merrily, and the smart, yacht-like vessel began to forge ahead.

"Now then," said the officer, as his craft gathered way, "give us a description of this barge. What is she like?"

"She's a small stumpy," the senior fisherman explained, "flying light; wants paint badly; steers with a wheel; green transom with *Bluebell*, *Maldon*, cut in and gilded. Seemed to be keeping along the north shore."

With these particulars in his mind, the officer explored the western horizon with a pair of night-glasses,

although it was still broad daylight. Presently he reported : " There's a stumpy in a line with the Black-tail Spit buoy. Just take a look at her." He handed his glasses to the fisherman, who, after a careful inspection of the stranger, gave it as his opinion that she was our quarry. " Probably makin' for Southend or Leigh," said he, and added : " I'll bet she's bound for Benfleet Creek. Nice quiet place, that, to land the stuff."

Our recent painful experience was now reversed, for as our swift little vessel devoured the miles of water, the barge, which we were all watching eagerly, loomed up larger every minute. By the time we were abreast of the Mouse Lightship, she was but a few hundred yards ahead, and even through my glasses, the name *Bluebell* was clearly legible. Badger nearly wept with delight ; the officer in charge smiled an anticipatory smile ; the deck-hands girded up their loins for the coming capture and the plain-clothes men each furtively polished a pair of handcuffs.

At length the little cruiser came fairly abreast of the barge—not unobserved by the two men on her deck. Then she sheered in suddenly and swept alongside. One hand neatly hooked a shroud with a grappling iron and made fast while a couple of preventive officers, the plain-clothes men and the inspector jumped down simultaneously on to the barge's deck. For a moment, the two bawley men were inclined to show fight ; but the odds were too great. After a perfunctory scuffle they both submitted to be handcuffed and were at once hauled up on board the cruiser and lodged in the fore-peak under guard. Then the chief officer, the two fishermen and I jumped on board

the barge and followed Badger down the companion hatch to the cabin.

It was a curious scene that was revealed in that little cupboard-like apartment by the light of Badger's electric torch. On each of the two lockers was stretched a man, securely lashed with lead-line and having drawn over his face a knitted stocking cap, while on the little triangular fixed table rested an iron-bound box which I instantly identified by my recollection of the description of the bullion case in the ship's manifest. It was but the work of a minute to liberate the skipper and his son and send them up, wrathful but substantially uninjured, to refresh on the cruiser; and then the ponderous treasure-chest was borne in triumph by two muscular deck-hands, up the narrow steps, to be hoisted to the Government vessel.

"Well, well," said the inspector, mopping his face with his handkerchief, "all's well that ends well, but I thought I had lost the men and the stuff that time. What are you going to do? I shall stay on board as this boat is going right up to the Custom House in London; but if you want to get home sooner, I dare say the chief officer will put you ashore at Southend."

I decided to adopt this course, and I was accordingly landed at Southend Pier with a telegram from Badger to his head-quarters; and at Southend I was fortunate enough to catch an express train which brought me to Fenchurch Street while the night was still young.

When I reached our chambers, I found Thorndyke seated by the fire, serenely studying a brief. He stood up as I entered and, laying aside the brief, remarked:

"You are back sooner than I expected. How sped the chase? Did you catch the barge?"

"Yes. We've got the men and we've got the bullion. But we very nearly lost both;" and here I gave him an account of the pursuit and the capture, to which he listened with the liveliest interest. "That Customs cruiser was a piece of sheer luck," said he, when I had concluded. "I am delighted. This capture simplifies the case for us enormously."

"It seems to me to dispose of the case altogether," said I. "The property is recovered and the thieves are in custody. But I think most of the credit belongs to Badger."

Thorndyke smiled enigmatically. "I should let him have it all, Jervis," he said; and then, after a reflective pause, he continued: "We will go round to Scotland Yard in the morning to verify the capture. If the package agrees with the description in the bill of lading, the case, as you say, is disposed of."

"It is hardly necessary," said I. "The marks were all correct and the Customs seals were unbroken—but still, I know you won't be satisfied until you have verified everything for yourself. And I suppose you are right."

It was past eleven in the following forenoon when we invaded Superintendent Miller's office at Scotland Yard. That genial officer looked up from his desk as we entered and laughed joyously. "I told you so, Badger," he chuckled, turning to the inspector, who had also looked up and was regarding us with a foxy smile. "I knew the doctor wouldn't be satisfied until he had seen it with

his own eyes. I suppose that is what you have come for, sir?"

"Yes," was the reply. "It is a mere ^{conventionality} formality, of course, but, if you don't mind——"

"Not in the least," replied Miller. "Come along, Badger, and show the doctor your prize."

The two officers conducted us to a room, which the superintendent unlocked, and which contained a small table, a measuring standard, a weighing machine, a set of Snellen's test-types, and the now historic case of bullion. The latter Thorndyke inspected closely, checking the marks and dimensions by his notes.

"I see you haven't opened it," he remarked.

"No," replied Miller. "Why should we? The Customs seals are intact."

"I thought you might like to know what was inside," Thorndyke explained.

The two officers looked at him quickly and the inspector exclaimed: "But we do know. It was opened and checked at the Customs."

"What do you suppose is inside?" Thorndyke asked.

"I don't suppose," Badger replied testily. "I know. There are four bars of gold inside."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "as the representative of the Insurance Company, I should like to see the contents of that case."

The two officers stared at him in amazement, as also, I must admit, did I. The implied doubt seemed utterly contrary to reason.

"This is scepticism with a vengeance!" said Miller. "How on earth is it possible—but there, I suppose if you are not satisfied, we should be justified——"

He glanced at his subordinate, who snorted impatiently: "Oh, open it and let him see the bars. And then, I suppose, he will want us to make an assay of the metal."

The superintendent retired with wrinkled brows and presently returned with a screwdriver, a hammer and a case-opener. Very deftly he broke the seals, extracted the screws and prised up the lid of the case, inside which were one or two folds of thick canvas. Lifting these with something of a flourish, he displayed the upper pair of dull, yellow bars.

"Are you satisfied now, sir?" demanded Badger. "Or do you want to see the other two?"

Thorndyke looked reflectively at the two bars, and the two officers looked inquiringly at him (but one might as profitably have watched the expression on the face of a ship's figurehead). Then he took from his pocket a folding foot-rule and quickly measured the three dimensions of one of the bars.

"Is that weighing machine reliable?" he asked.

"It is correct to an ounce," the superintendent replied, gazing at my colleague with a slightly uneasy expression. "Why?"

By way of reply Thorndyke lifted out the bar that he had measured and carrying it across to the machine, laid it on the platform and carefully adjusted the weights.

"Well?" the superintendent queried anxiously, as Thorndyke took the reading from the scale.

"Twenty-nine pounds three ounces," replied Thorndyke.

"Well?" repeated the superintendent. "What about it?"

Thorndyke looked at him impassively for a moment, and then, in the same quiet tone, answered: "Lead."

"What!" the two officers shrieked in unison, darting across to the scale and glaring at the bar of metal. Then Badger recovered himself and expostulated, not without temper, "Nonsense, sir. Look at it. Can't you see that it is gold?"

"I can see that it is gilded," replied Thorndyke.

"But," protested Miller, "the thing is impossible! What makes you think it is lead?"

"It is just a question of specific gravity," was the reply. "This bar contains seventy-two cubic inches of metal and it weighs twenty-nine pounds three ounces. Therefore it is a bar of lead. But if you are still doubtful, it is quite easy to settle the matter. May I cut a small piece off the bar?"

The superintendent gasped and looked at his subordinate. "I suppose," said he, "under the circumstances—eh, Badger? Yes. Very well, Doctor."

Thorndyke produced a strong pocket-knife, and, having lifted the bar to the table, applied the knife to one corner and tapped it smartly with the hammer. The blade passed easily through the soft metal, and as the detached piece fell to the floor, the two officers and I craned forward eagerly. And then all possible doubts were set at rest. There was no mistaking the white, silvery lustre of the freshly-cut surface.

"Snakes!" exclaimed the superintendent. "This is a fair knock-out! Why, the blighters have got away with the stuff, after all! Unless," he added, with a quizzical look at Thorndyke, "you know where it is, Doctor. I expect you do."

"I believe I do," said Thorndyke, "and if you care to come down with me to the London Docks, I think I can hand it over to you."

The superintendent's face brightened appreciably. Not so Badger's. That afflicted officer flung down the chip of metal that he had been examining, and, turning to Thorndyke, demanded sourly: "Why didn't you tell us this before, sir? You let me go off chivvying that damn barge, and you knew all the time that the stuff wasn't on board."

"My dear Badger," Thorndyke expostulated, "don't you see that these lead bars are essential to our case? They prove that the gold bars were never landed and that they are consequently still on the ship. Which empowers us to detain any gold that we may find on her."

"There, now, Badger," said the superintendent, "it's no use for you to argue with the Doctor. He's like a giraffe. He can see all round him at once. Let us get on to the Docks."

Having locked the room, we all sallied forth, and, taking a train at Charing Cross Station, made our way by Mark Lane and Fenchurch Street to Wapping, where, following Thorndyke, we entered the Docks and proceeded straight to a wharf near the Wapping entrance. Here Thorndyke exchanged a few words with a Customs official, who hurried away and presently returned accompanied by an officer of higher rank. The latter having saluted Thorndyke and cast a slightly amused glance at our little party, said: "They've landed that package that you spoke about. I've had it put in my office for the present. Will you come and have a look at it?"

We followed him to his office behind a long row of sheds, where, on a table, was a strong wooden case, somewhat larger than the "bullion" case, while, on the desk, a large many-leaved document lay open.

"This is your case, I think," said the official; "but you had better check it by the manifest. Here is the entry: 'One case containing seventeen and three-quarter dozen brass six-inch by three-eighths screw-bolts with nuts. Dimensions, sixteen inches by thirteen by nine. Gross weight a hundred and nineteen pounds; net weight a hundred and thirteen pounds.' Consigned to 'Jackson and Walker, 593, Great Alie Street, London, E.' Is that the one?"

"That is the one," Thorndyke replied.

"Then," said our friend, "we'll get it open and have a look at those brass screw-bolts."

With a dexterity surprising in an official of such high degree, he had the screws out in a twinkling, and prising up the lid, displayed a fold of coarse canvas. As he lifted this the two police officers peered eagerly into the case; and suddenly the eager expression on Badger's face changed to one of bitter disappointment.

"You've missed fire this time, sir," he snapped. "This is just a case of brass bolts."

"Gold bolts, Inspector," Thorndyke corrected, placidly. He picked out one and handed it to the astonished detective. "Did you ever feel a brass bolt of that weight?" he asked.

"Well, it certainly is devilish heavy," the inspector admitted, weighing it in his hand and passing it on to Miller.

"Its weight as stated on the manifest," said Thorn-

dyke, "works out at well over eight and a half ounces, but we may as well check it." He produced from his pocket a little spring balance, to which he slung the bolt. "You see," he said, "it weighs eight ounces and two-thirds. But a brass bolt of the same size would weigh only three ounces and four-fifths. There is not the least doubt that these bolts are gold; and as you see that their aggregate weight is a hundred and thirteen while the weight of the four missing bars is a hundred and thirteen pounds two ounces, it is a reasonable inference that these bolts represent those bars; and an uncommonly good job they made of the melting to lose only two ounces. Has the consignee's agent turned up yet?"

"He is waiting outside," replied the officer, with a pleased smile, "hopping about like a pea in a frying-pan. I'll call him in."

He did so, and a small, seedy man of strongly Semitic aspect approached the door with nervous caution and a rather pale face. But when his beady eye fell on the open case and the portentous assembly in the office, he turned about and fled along the wharf as if the hosts of the Philistines were at his heels.

"Of course it is all perfectly simple, as you say," I replied to Thorndyke as we strolled back up Nightingale Lane, "but I don't see where you got your start. What made you think that the stolen case was a dummy?"

"At first," Thorndyke replied, "it was just a matter of alternative hypotheses. It was purely speculative. The robbery described by Halethorpe was a very crude affair. It was planned in quite the wrong way. Noting

this, I naturally asked myself: What is the right way to steal a case of gold ingots? Now, the outstanding difficulty in such a robbery arises from the ponderous nature of the thing stolen, and the way to overcome that difficulty is to get away with the booty at leisure before the robbery is discovered—the longer the better. It is also obvious that if you can delude someone into stealing your dummy you will have covered up your tracks most completely; for if that someone is caught, the issues are extremely confused, and if he is not caught, all the tracks lead away from you. Of course, he will discover the fraud when he tries to dispose of the swag, but his lips are sealed by the fact that he has, himself, committed a felony. So that is the proper strategical plan; and, though it was wildly improbable, and there was nothing whatever to suggest it, still, the possibility that this crude robbery might cover a more subtle one, had to be borne in mind. It was necessary to make absolutely certain that the gold bars were really in the case when it left Bellhaven. I had practically no doubt that they were. Our visit to the Custom House was little more than a formality, just to give us an undeniable datum from which to make our start. We had to find somebody who had actually seen the case open and verified the contents, and when we found that man—Mr. Byrne—it instantly became obvious that the wildly improbable thing had really happened. The gold bars had already disappeared. I had calculated the approximate size of the real bars. They would contain forty-two cubic inches, and would be about seven inches by three by two. The dimensions given by Byrne—evidently correct, as shown by those of the case, which the bars fitted pretty closely—were impossible. If those

bars had been gold, they would have weighed two hundred pounds, instead of the hundred and thirteen pounds shown on his report. The astonishing thing is that Byrne did not observe the discrepancy. There are not many Customs officers who would have let it pass."

"Isn't it rather odd," I asked, "that the thieves should have gambled on such a remote chance?"

"It is pretty certain," he replied, "that they were unaware of the risk they were taking. Probably they assumed—as most persons would have done—that a case of bullion would be merely inspected and passed. Few persons realise the rigorous methods of the Customs officers. But to resume: It was obvious that the 'gold' bars that Byrne had examined were dummies. The next question was, where were the real bars? Had they been made away with, or were they still on the ship? To settle this question I decided to go through the manifest and especially through the column of net weights. And there, presently, I came upon a package the net weight of which was within two ounces of the weight of the stolen bars. And that package was a parcel of brass screw-bolts—on a home-ward-bound ship! But who on earth sends brass bolts from Africa to London? The anomaly was so striking that I examined the entry more closely, and then I found—by dividing the net weight by the number of bolts—that each of these little bolts weighed over half a pound. But, if this were so, those bolts could be of no other metal than gold or platinum, and were almost certainly gold. Also, their aggregate weight was exactly that of the stolen bars, less two ounces, which probably represented loss in melting."

"And the scrivelloes," said I, "and the gum copal and the kola nuts; what was their bearing on the inquiry? I can't, even now, trace any connection."

Thorndyke cast an astonished glance at me, and then replied with a quiet chuckle: "There wasn't any. Those notes were for the benefit of the shipping gentleman. As he would look over my shoulder, I had to give him something to read and think about. If I had noted only the brass bolts, I should have virtually informed him of the nature of my suspicions."

"Then, really, you had the case complete when we left Bellhaven?"

"Theoretically, yes. But we had to recover the stolen case, for, without those lead ingots we could not prove that the gold bolts were stolen property, any more than one could prove a murder without evidence of the death of the victim."

"And how do you suppose the robbery was carried out? How was the gold got out of the ship's strong-room?"

"I should say it was never there. The robbers, I suspect, are the ship's mate, the chief engineer and possibly the purser. The mate controls the stowage of cargo, and the chief engineer controls the repair shop and has the necessary skill and knowledge to deal with the metal. On receiving the advice of the bullion consignment, I imagine they prepared the dummy case in agreement with the description. When the bullion arrived, the dummy case would be concealed on deck and the exchange made as soon as the bullion was put on board. The dummy would be sent to the strong-room and the real case carried to a prepared hiding-place. Then the engineer would cut up the bars, melt

them piecemeal and cast them into bolts in an ordinary casting-flask, using an iron bolt as a model, and touching up the screw-threads with a die. The mate could enter the case on the manifest when he pleased, and send the bill of lading by post to the nominal consignee. That is what I imagine to have been the procedure."

Thorndyke's solution turned out to be literally correct. The consignee, pursued by Inspector Badger along the quay, was arrested at the dock gates and immediately volunteered King's evidence. Thereupon the mate, the chief engineer and the purser of the steamship *Labadi* were arrested and brought to trial; when they severally entered a plea of guilty and described the method of the robbery almost in Thorndyke's words.

From "Dr. Thorndyke's Case-Book."

IV

THE LIVERPOOL MYSTERY

BARONESS ORCZY

Just at

"**A** TITLE—a foreign title, I mean—is always very useful for purposes of swindles and frauds," remarked the man in the corner to Polly one day. "The cleverest robberies of modern times were perpetrated lately in Vienna by a man who dubbed himself Lord Seymour; whilst over here the same class of thief calls himself Count Something ending in 'o,' or Prince the other, ending in 'off.'"

"Fortunately for our hotel and lodging-house keepers over here," she replied, "they are beginning to be more alive to the ways of foreign swindlers, and look upon all titled gentry who speak broken English as possible swindlers or thieves."

"The result sometimes being exceedingly unpleasant to the real *grands seigneurs* who honour this country at times with their visits," replied the man in the corner.

"Now, take the case of Prince Semionicz, a man whose sixteen quarterings are duly recorded in *Gotha*, who carried enough luggage with him to pay for the use of every room in an hotel for at least a week, whose gold cigarette case with diamond and turquoise ornament was actually stolen without his taking the slightest trouble to try and recover it; that same man was undoubtedly looked upon with suspicion by the manager of the Liverpool North-Western Hotel from the moment that his secretary—a dapper, somewhat vulgar.

little Frenchman—bespoke on behalf of his employer, with himself and a valet, the best suite of rooms the hotel contained.

“Obviously those suspicions were unfounded, for the little secretary, as soon as Prince Semionicz had arrived, deposited with the manager a pile of bank notes, also papers and bonds, the value of which would exceed tenfold the most outrageous bill that could possibly be placed before the noble visitor. Moreover, M. Albert Lambert explained that the Prince, who only meant to stay in Liverpool a few days, was on his way to Chicago, where he wished to visit Princess Anna Semionicz, his sister, who was married to Mr. Girwan, the great copper king and multi-millionaire.

“Yet, as I told you before, in spite of all these undoubted securities, suspicion of the wealthy Russian Prince lurked in the minds of most Liverpoolians who came in business contact with him. He had been at the North-Western two days when he sent his secretary to Winslow and Vassall, the jewellers of Bold Street, with a request that they would kindly send a representative round to the hotel with some nice pieces of jewellery, diamonds and pearls chiefly, which he was desirous of taking as a present to his sister in Chicago.

“Mr. Winslow took the order from M. Albert with a pleasant bow. Then he went to his inner office and consulted with his partner, Mr. Vassall, as to the best course to adopt. Both the gentlemen were desirous of doing business, for business had been very slack lately: neither wished to refuse a possible customer, or to offend Mr. Pettitt, the manager of the North-Western, who had recommended them to the Prince. But that foreign title and the vulgar little French secretary stuck

in the throats of the two pompous and worthy Liverpool jewellers, and together they agreed, firstly, that no credit should be given; and, secondly, that if a cheque or even a banker's draft were tendered, the jewels were not to be given up until that cheque or draft was cashed.

"Then came the question as to who should take the jewels to the hotel. It was altogether against business etiquette for the senior partners to do such errands themselves; moreover, it was thought that it would be easier for a clerk to explain, without giving undue offence, that he could not take the responsibility of a cheque or draft, without having cashed it previously to giving up the jewels.

"Then there was the question of the probable necessity of conferring in a foreign tongue. The head assistant, Charles Needham, who had been in the employ of Winslow and Vassall for over twelve years, was, in true British fashion, ignorant of any language save his own; it was therefore decided to dispatch Mr. Schwarz, a young German clerk lately arrived, on the delicate errand.

"Mr. Schwarz was Mr. Winslow's nephew and godson, a sister of that gentleman having married the head of the great German firm of Schwarz & Co., silver-smiths, of Hamburg and Berlin.

"The young man had soon become a great favourite with his uncle, whose heir he would presumably be, as Mr. Winslow had no children.

"At first Mr. Vassall made some demur about sending Mr. Schwarz with so many valuable jewels alone in a city which he had not yet had the time to study thoroughly; but finally he allowed himself to be persuaded by his senior partner, and a fine selection of necklaces, pendants, bracelets, and rings, amounting in

value to over £16,000, having been made, it was decided that Mr. Schwarz should go to the North-Western in a cab the next day at about three o'clock in the afternoon. This he accordingly did, the following day being a Thursday.

"Business went on in the shop as usual under the direction of the head assistant, until about seven o'clock, when Mr. Winslow returned from his club, where he usually spent an hour over the papers every afternoon, and at once asked for his nephew. To his astonishment Mr. Needham informed him that Mr. Schwarz had not yet returned. This seemed a little strange, and Mr. Winslow, with a slightly anxious look in his face, went into the inner office in order to consult his junior partner. Mr. Vassall offered to go round to the hotel and interview Mr. Pettitt.

" 'I was beginning to get anxious myself,' he said, 'but did not quite like to say so. I have been in over half an hour, hoping every moment that you would come in, and that perhaps you could give me some reassuring news. I thought that perhaps you had met Mr. Schwarz, and were coming back together.'

"However, Mr. Vassall walked round to the hotel and interviewed the hall porter. The latter perfectly well remembered Mr. Schwarz sending in his card to Prince Semionicz.

" 'At what time was that?' asked Mr. Vassall.

" 'About ten minutes past three, sir, when he came; it was about an hour later when he left.'

" 'When he left?' gasped, more than said, Mr. Vassall.

" 'Yes, sir. Mr. Schwarz left here about a quarter before four, sir.'

“ ‘Are you quite sure?’

“ ‘Quite sure. Mr. Pettitt was in the hall when he left, and he asked him something about business. Mr. Schwarz laughed and said, “Not bad.” I hope there’s nothing wrong, sir,’ added the man.

“ ‘Oh—er—nothing—thank you. Can I see Mr. Pettitt?’

“ ‘Certainly, sir.’

“ Mr. Pettitt, the manager of the hotel, shared Mr. Vassall’s anxiety, immediately he heard that the young German had not yet returned home.

“ ‘I spoke to him a little before four o’clock. We had just switched on the electric light, which we always do these winter months at that hour. But I shouldn’t worry myself, Mr. Vassall; the young man may have seen to some business on his way home. You’ll probably find him in when you go back.’

“ Apparently somewhat reassured, Mr. Vassall thanked Mr. Pettitt, and hurried back to the shop, only to find that Mr. Schwarz had not returned, though it was now close on eight o’clock.

“ Mr. Winslow looked so haggard and upset that it would have been cruel to heap reproaches upon his other troubles or to utter so much as the faintest suspicion that young Schwarz’s permanent disappearance with £16,000 in jewels and money was within the bounds of probability.

“ There was one chance left, but under the circumstances a very slight one indeed. The Winslows’ private house was up the Birkenhead end of the town. Young Schwarz had been living with them ever since his arrival in Liverpool, and he may have—either not feeling well or for some other reason—gone straight

home without calling at the shop. It was unlikely, as valuable jewellery was never kept at the private house, but—it just might have happened.

“It would be useless,” continued the man in the corner, “and decidedly uninteresting, were I to relate to you Messrs. Winslow’s and Vassall’s further anxieties with regard to the missing young man. Suffice it to say that on reaching his private house Mr. Winslow found that his godson had neither returned nor sent any telegraphic message of any kind.

“Not wishing to alarm his wife needlessly, Mr. Winslow made an attempt at eating his dinner, but directly after that he hurried back to the North-Western Hotel, and asked to see Prince Semionicz. The Prince was at the theatre with his secretary, and probably would not be home until nearly midnight.

“Mr. Winslow, then, not knowing what to think, nor yet what to fear, and in spite of the horror he felt of giving publicity to his nephew’s disappearance, thought it his duty to go round to the police-station and interview the inspector. It is wonderful how quickly news of that type travels in a large city like Liverpool. Already the morning papers of the following day were full of the latest sensation: ‘Mysterious disappearance of a well-known tradesman.’

“Mr. Winslow found a copy of the paper containing the sensational announcement on his breakfast-table. It lay side by side with a letter addressed to him in his nephew’s handwriting, which had been posted in Liverpool.

“Mr. Winslow placed that letter, written to him by his nephew, into the hands of the police. Its contents, therefore, quickly became public property. The

astounding statements made therein by Mr. Schwarz created, in quiet, business-like Liverpool, a sensation which has seldom been equalled.

"It appears that the young fellow did call on Prince Semionicz at a quarter past three on Wednesday, December 10th, with a bag full of jewels, amounting in value to some £16,000. The Prince duly admired, and finally selected from among the ornaments a necklace, pendant, and bracelet, the whole being priced by Mr. Schwarz, according to his instructions, at £10,500. Prince Semionicz was most prompt and business-like in his dealings.

" 'You will require immediate payment for these, of course,' he said in perfect English, 'and I know you business men prefer solid cash to cheques, especially when dealing with foreigners. I always provide myself with plenty of Bank of England notes in consequence,' he added with a pleasant smile, 'as £10,500 in gold would perhaps be a little inconvenient to carry. If you will kindly make out the receipt, my secretary, M. Lambert, will settle all business matters with you.'

"He thereupon took the jewels he had selected and locked them up in his dressing-case, the beautiful silver fittings of which Mr. Schwarz just caught a short glimpse of. Then, having been accommodated with paper and ink, the young jeweller made out the account and receipt, whilst M. Lambert, the secretary, counted out before him 105 crisp Bank of England notes of £100 each. Then, with a final bow to his exceedingly urbane and eminently satisfactory customer, Mr. Schwarz took his leave. In the hall he saw and spoke to Mr. Pettitt, and then he went out into the street.

"He had just left the hotel and was about to cross

towards St. George's Hall when a gentleman, in a magnificent fur coat, stepped quickly out of a cab which had been stationed near the kerb, and, touching him lightly upon the shoulder, said with an unmistakable air of authority, at the same time handing him a card :

“ ‘That is my name. I must speak with you immediately.’ ”

“ Schwarz glanced at the card, and by the light of the arc lamps above his head read on it the name of ‘Dimitri Slaviansky Burgreneff, de la III^e Section de la Police Impériale de S. M. le Czar.’ ”

“ Quickly the owner of the unpronounceable name and the significant title pointed to the cab from which he had just alighted, and Schwarz, whose every suspicion with regard to his princely customer bristled up in one moment, clutched his bag and followed his imposing interlocutor; as soon as they were both comfortably seated in the cab the latter began, with courteous apology in broken but fluent English :

“ ‘I must ask your pardon, sir, for thus trespassing upon your valuable time, and I certainly should not have done so but for the certainty that our interests in a certain matter which I have in hand are practically identical, in so far that we both should wish to outwit a clever rogue.’ ”

“ Instinctively, and his mind full of terrible apprehension, Mr. Schwarz's hand wandered to his pocket-book, filled to overflowing with the banknotes which he had so lately received from the Prince.

“ ‘Ah, I see,’ interposed the courteous Russian with a smile, ‘he has played the confidence trick on you, with the usual addition of so many so-called banknotes.’ ”

“ ‘So-called,’ gasped the unfortunate young man.

“ ‘I don’t think I often err in my estimate of my own countrymen,’ continued M. Burgreneff; ‘I have vast experience, you must remember. Therefore, I doubt if I am doing M.—er—what does he call himself?—Prince something—an injustice if I assert, even without handling those crisp bits of paper you have in your pocket-book, that no bank would exchange them for gold.’

“Remembering his uncle’s suspicions and his own, Mr. Schwarz cursed himself for his blindness and folly in accepting notes so easily without for a moment imagining that they might be false. Now, with every one of those suspicions fully on the alert, he felt the bits of paper with nervous, anxious fingers, while the imperturbable Russian calmly struck a match.

“ ‘See here,’ he said, pointing to one of the notes, ‘the shape of that “w” in the signature of the chief cashier. I am not an English police officer, but I could pick out that spurious “w” among a thousand genuine ones. You see, I have seen a good many.’

“Now, of course, poor young Schwarz had not seen very many Bank of England notes. He could not have told whether one ‘w’ in Mr. Bowen’s signature is better than another, but, though he did not speak English nearly as fluently as his pompous interlocutor, he understood every word of the appalling statement the latter had just made.

“ ‘Then that Prince,’ he said, ‘at the hotel——’

“ ‘Is no more Prince than you and I, my dear sir,’ concluded the gentleman of His Imperial Majesty’s police calmly.

“ ‘And the jewels? Mr. Winslow’s jewels?’

“‘With the jewels there may be a chance—oh! a mere chance. These forged bank-notes, which you accepted so trustingly, may prove the means of recovering your property.’

“‘How?’

“‘The penalty of forging and circulating spurious bank-notes is very heavy. You know that. The fear of seven years’ penal servitude will act as a wonderful sedative upon the—er—Prince’s joyful mood. He will give up the jewels to me all right enough, never you fear. He knows,’ added the Russian officer grimly, ‘that there are plenty of old scores to settle up, without the additional one of forged bank-notes. Our interests, you see, are identical. May I rely on your co-operation?’

“‘Oh, I will do as you wish,’ said the delighted young German. ‘Mr. Winslow and Mr. Vassall, they trusted me, and I have been such a fool. I hope it is not too late.’

“‘I think not,’ said M. Burgreneff, his hand already on the door of the cab. ‘Though I have been talking to you I have kept an eye on the hotel, and our friend the Prince has not yet gone out. We are accustomed, you know, to have eyes everywhere, we of the Russian secret police. I don’t think that I will ask you to be present at the confrontation. Perhaps you will wait for me in the cab. There is a nasty fog outside, and you will be more private. Will you give me those beautiful bank-notes? Thank you! Don’t be anxious. I won’t be long.’

“He lifted his hat, and slipped the notes into the inner pocket of his magnificent fur coat. As he did so, Mr. Schwarz caught sight of a rich uniform and a wide

sash, which no doubt was destined to carry additional moral weight with the clever rogue upstairs.

"Then His Imperial Majesty's police officer stepped quickly out of the cab, and Mr. Schwarz was left alone.

"Yes, left severely alone," continued the man in the corner with a sarcastic chuckle. "So severely alone, in fact, that one quarter of an hour after another passed by and still the magnificent police officer in the gorgeous uniform did not return. Then, when it was too late, Schwarz cursed himself once again for the double-dyed idiot that he was. He had been only too ready to believe that Prince Semionicz was a liar and a rogue, and under these unjust suspicions he had fallen an all too easy prey to one of the most cunning rascals he had ever come across.

"An inquiry from the hall porter at the North-Western elicited the fact that no such personage as Mr. Schwarz described had entered the hotel. The young man asked to see Prince Semionicz, hoping against hope that all was not yet lost. The Prince received him most courteously; he was dictating some letters to his secretary, while the valet was in the next room preparing his master's evening clothes. Mr. Schwarz found it very difficult to explain what he actually did want.

"There stood the dressing-case in which the Prince had locked up the jewels, and there the bag from which the secretary had taken the bank-notes. After much hesitation on Schwarz's part and much impatience on that of the Prince, the young man blurted out the whole story of the so-called Russian police officer whose card he still held in his hand.

"The Prince, it appears, took the whole thing wonderfully good-naturedly; no doubt he thought the

jeweller a hopeless fool. He showed him the jewels, the receipt he held, and also a large bundle of bank-notes similar to those Schwarz had with such culpable folly given up to the clever rascal in the cab.

" 'I pay all my bills with Bank of England notes, Mr. Schwarz. It would have been wiser, perhaps, if you had spoken to the manager of the hotel about me before you were so ready to believe any cock-and-bull story about my supposed rogueries.' *false story*

" Finally he placed a small 16mo volume before the young jeweller, and said with a pleasant smile :

" 'If people in this country who are in a large way of business, and are therefore likely to come in contact with people of foreign nationality, were to study these little volumes before doing business with any foreigner who claims a title, much disappointment and a great loss would often be saved. Now in this case had you looked up page 797 of this little volume of *Gotha's Almanach* you would have seen my name in it and known from the first that the so-called Russian detective was a liar.'

" There was nothing more to be said, and Mr. Schwarz left the hotel. No doubt, now that he had been hopelessly duped he dared not go home, and half hoped by communicating with the police that they might succeed in arresting the thief before he had time to leave Liverpool. He interviewed Detective-Inspector Watson, and was at once confronted with the awful difficulty which would make the recovery of the bank-notes practically hopeless. He had never had the time or opportunity of jotting down the numbers of the notes.

" Mr. Winslow, though terribly wrathful against his

nephew, did not wish to keep him out of his home. As soon as he had received Schwarz's letter, he traced him, with Inspector Watson's help, to his lodgings in North Street, where the unfortunate young man meant to remain hidden until the terrible storm had blown over, or perhaps until the thief had been caught redhanded with the booty still in his hands.

"This happy event, needless to say, never did occur, though the police made very effort to trace the man who had decoyed Schwarz into the cab. His appearance was such an uncommon one; it seemed most unlikely that no one in Liverpool should have noticed him after he left that cab. The wonderful fur coat, the long beard, all must have been noticeable, even though it was past four o'clock on a somewhat foggy December afternoon.

"But every investigation proved futile; no one answering Schwarz's description of the man had been seen anywhere. The papers continued to refer to the case as 'the Liverpool Mystery.' Scotland Yard sent Mr. Fairburn down—the celebrated detective—at the request of the Liverpool police, to help in the investigations, but nothing availed.

"Prince Semionicz, with his suite, left Liverpool, and he who had attempted to blacken his character, and had succeeded in robbing Messrs. Winslow and Vassall of £10,500, had completely disappeared."

The man in the corner readjusted his collar and necktie, which, during the narrative of this interesting mystery, had worked its way up his long, crane-like neck under his large flappy ears. His costume of checked tyeed of a peculiarly loud pattern had tickled the fancy of some of the waitresses, who were standing

gazing at him and giggling in one corner. This evidently made him nervous. He gazed up very meekly at Polly, looking for all the world like a bald-headed adjutant dressed for a holiday.

"Of course, all sorts of theories of the theft got about at first. One of the most popular and at the same time most quickly exploded, being that young Schwarz had told a cock-and-bull story, and was the actual thief himself.

"However, as I said before, that was very quickly exploded, as Mr. Schwarz senior, a very wealthy merchant, never allowed his son's carelessness to be a serious loss to his kind employers. As soon as he thoroughly grasped all the circumstances of the extraordinary case he drew a cheque for £10,500 and remitted it to Messrs. Winslow and Vassall. It was just, but it was also high-minded.

"All Liverpool knew of the generous action, as Mr. Winslow took care that it should; and any evil suspicion regarding young Mr. Schwarz vanished as quickly as it had come.

"Then, of course, there was the theory about the Prince and his suite, and to this day I fancy there are plenty of people in Liverpool, and also in London, who declare that the so-called Russian police officer was a confederate. No doubt that theory was very plausible, and Messrs. Winslow and Vassall spent a good deal of money in trying to prove a case against the Russian Prince.

"Very soon, however, that theory was also bound to collapse. Mr. Fairburn, whose reputation as an investigator of crime waxes in direct inverted ratio to his capacities, did hit upon the obvious course of inter-

viewing the managers of the large London and Liverpool *agents de change*. He soon found that Prince Semionicz had converted a great deal of Russian and French money into English bank-notes since his arrival in this country. More than £30,000 in good solid, honest money was traced to the pockets of the gentleman with the sixteen quarterings. It seemed, therefore, more than improbable that a man who was obviously fairly wealthy would risk imprisonment and hard labour, if not worse, for the sake of increasing his fortune by £10,000.

"However, the theory of the Prince's guilt has taken firm root in the dull minds of our police authorities. They have had every information with regard to Prince Semionicz's antecedents from Russia; his position, his wealth, have been placed above suspicion, and yet they suspect and go on suspecting him or his secretary. They have communicated with the police of every European capital; and while they still hope to obtain sufficient evidence against those they suspect, they calmly allow the guilty to enjoy the fruit of his clever roguery."

"The guilty?" said Polly. "Who do you think——"

"Who do I think knew at that moment that young Schwarz had money in his possession?" he said excitedly, wriggling in his chair like a Jack-in-the-box. "Obviously some one was guilty of that theft who knew that Schwarz had gone to interview a rich Russian, and would in all probability return with a large sum of money in his possession."

"Who, indeed, but the Prince and his secretary?" she argued. "But just now you said——"

"Just now I said that the police were determined to find the Prince and his secretary guilty; they did not look further than their own stumpy noses. Messrs. Winslow and Vassall spent money with a free hand in those investigations. Mr. Winslow, as the senior partner, stood to lose over £9,000 by that robbery. Now, with Mr. Vassall it was different. St.

"When I saw how the police went on blundering in this case I took the trouble to make certain inquiries, the whole thing interested me so much, and I learnt all that I wished to know. I found out, namely, that Mr. Vassall was very much a junior partner in the firm, that he only drew ten per cent. of the profits, having been promoted lately to a partnership from having been senior assistant.

"Now, the police did not take the trouble to find that out."

"But you don't mean that——"

"I mean that in all cases where robbery affects more than one person the first thing to find out is whether it affects the second party equally with the first. I proved that to you, didn't I, over that robbery in Phillimore Terrace? There, as here, one of the two parties stood to lose very little in comparison with the other——"

"Even then——" she began.

"Wait a moment, for I found out something more. The moment I had ascertained that Mr. Vassall was not drawing more than about £500 a year from the business profits I tried to ascertain at what rate he lived and what were his chief vices. I found that he kept a fine house in Albert Terrace. Now, the rents of those houses are £250 a year. Therefore speculation, horse-racing or

some sort of gambling, must help to keep up that establishment. Speculation and most forms of gambling are synonymous with debt and ruin. It is only a question of time. Whether Mr. Vassall was in debt or not at the time, that I cannot say, but this I do know, that ever since that unfortunate loss to him of about £1,000 he has kept his house in nicer style than before, and he now has a good banking account at the Lancashire and Liverpool Bank, which he opened a year after his 'heavy loss.' "

"But it must have been very difficult——" argued Polly.

"What?" he said. "To have planned out the whole thing? For carrying it out was mere child's play. He had twenty-four hours in which to put his plan into execution. Why, what was there to do? Firstly, to go to a local printer in some out-of-the-way part of the town and get him to print a few cards with the high-sounding name. That, of course, is done 'while you wait.' Beyond that there was the purchase of a good second-hand uniform, fur coat, and a beard and a wig from a costumier's.

"No, no, the execution was not difficult; it was the planning of it all, the daring that was so fine. Schwarz, of course, was a foreigner; he had only been in England a little over a fortnight. Vassall's broken English misled him; probably he did not know the junior partner very intimately. I have no doubt that but for his uncle's absurd British prejudice and suspicions against the Russian Prince, Schwarz would not have been so ready to believe in the latter's roguery. As I said, it would be a great boon if English tradesmen studied *Gotha* more; but it was

clever, wasn't it? I couldn't have done it much better myself."

That last sentence was so characteristic. Before Polly could think of some plausible argument against his theory he was gone, and she was trying vainly to find another solution to the Liverpool mystery.

From "The Old Man in the Corner."

V
ONE OF THEM

A. E. W. MASON

AT midnight on August 4th, Poldhu flung the news out to all ships, and Anthony Strange, on the *Boulotte*, took the message in the middle of the West Bay. He carried on accordingly past Weymouth, and in the morning was confronted with the wall of great breakers off St. Alban's Head. The little boat ran towards that barrier with extraordinary swiftness. Strange put her at a gap close into the shore where the waves broke lower, and with a lurch and a shudder she scooped the water in over her bows and clothed herself to her brass gunwale-top in a stinging veil of salt. Never had the *Boulotte* behaved better than she did that morning in the welter of the Race, and Strange, rejoicing to his very finger-tips, forgot the news which was bringing all the pleasure-boats, great and small, into the harbours of the south, forgot even that sinking of the heart which had troubled him throughout the night. But it was only in the Race that he knew any comfort. He dropped his anchor in Poole Harbour by midday, and fled through London to a house he owned on the Berkshire Downs.

There for a few days he found life possible. It was true there were sentries under the railway bridges, but the sun rose each day over a country ripe for the harvest, and the smoke curled from the chimneys of pleasant villages ; and there was no sign of war. But soon the

nights became a torture. For from midnight on, at intervals of five to ten minutes, the troop-trains roared along the Thames Valley towards Avonmouth, and the reproach of each of them ceased only with the morning. Strange leaned out of his window looking down the slopes where the corn in the moonlight was like a mist. Not a light showed in the railway carriages, but the sparks danced above the funnel of the engine, and the glare of the furnace burnished the leaves of the trees. Soldiers, soldiers, soldiers on the road to France. Then there came a morning when, not a hundred yards from his house, he saw a string of horses in the road and others being taken from the reaping-machines in a field. Strange returned to town and dined with a Mrs. Kenway, his best friend, and to her he unburdened his soul.

"I am ashamed . . . don't know how to look people in the face. . . . I never thought to be so utterly unhappy. I am thirty and useless. I cumber the ground."

The look of surprise with which his friend turned to him hurt him like the cut of a whip. "Of course you can't help," it seemed to say. "The world is for the strong, this year and the next, and for how many more?"

Strange had to lie on his back for some hours each day, and he suffered off and on always. But that had been his lot since boyhood, and he had made light of his infirmity and grown used to it until this 4th of August. He had consoled himself with the knowledge that to the world he looked only rather delicate. He was tall, and not set apart from his fellows.

"Now," he said. "I wish that everybody knew. Yes, I wish that I showed that service was impossible. To think of us sitting here round a dinner-table—as we used to! Oh, I know what you'll think! I have the morbid sensitiveness of sick men. Perhaps you are right."

"I don't think it at all," she said, and she set herself to comfort him.

Strange went from the dinner party to his club. There was the inevitable crowd, fighting the campaign differently, cutting up the conquered countries, or crying all was lost. Some of them had written to the papers, all were somehow swollen with importance as though the war was their private property. Strange began to take heart.

"They are not ashamed," he thought. "They speak to me as if they expected I should be here. Perhaps I am a fool."

A friend sat down by his side.

"Cross went yesterday," he said. "George Crawley was killed at Mons. Of course you have heard."

Strange had not heard, and there rose before his eyes suddenly a picture of George Crawley, the youngest colonel in the army, standing on the kerb in St. James's Street and with uplifted face blaspheming to the skies at one o'clock in the morning because of a whiskered degenerate dandy with a frilled shirt to whom he had just before been introduced. But his friend was continuing his catalogue.

"Chalmers is training at Grantham. He's with the new army. Linton has joined the Flying Corps. Every day some one slips quietly away. God knows how many of them will come back."

Strange got up and walked out of the club.

"I shall see you to-morrow," his friend cried after him.

"No, I am going back to my boat."

"For how long?"

"Till the war's over."

The resolution had been taken that instant. He loved the *Boulotte* better than anything else in the world. For on board of her he was altogether a man. She was fifty-five feet long over all, fourteen feet in beam, twenty-five tons by Thames measurement, and his debt to her was enormous. He had found her in a shed in the Isle of Wight, re-coppered her, given her a new boiler, fixed her up with forced draught, and taken out for himself after a year's hard work a master's certificate. He took her over to Holland, and since her bows worked like a concertina in the heavy seaway between Dover and Dieppe he strengthened them with cross-pieces. He never ceased to tinker with her, he groused at her, and complained of her, and sneered at her, and doted on her in the true sailor's fashion. For some years past life had begun for him in the spring, when he passed Portland Bill bound westward for Fowey and Falmouth and the Scillies, and had ended in the late autumn, when he pulled the *Boulotte* up on the mud of Wootton Creek. Now he turned to her in his distress, and made a most miserable Odyssey. He spent a month in the estuary above Salcombe, steamed across to Havre, went down through the canals to Marseilles in the autumn of 1914, and sought one of the neutral coasts of the Mediterranean. Here, where men wore buttons in their coats inscribed, "Don't speak to me of the war," he fancied that he

might escape from the shame of his insufficiency. He came to a pleasant harbour, with a broad avenue of trees behind the quay, and a little ancient town behind the trees.

"I will drop my anchor here," he said, "until the war ends"; and he remained, speaking to no one but his crew, sleeping in his little cabin, and only going on shore to buy his newspapers and take his coffee. And after five weeks the miracle began to happen. He was sitting on his deck one morning reading a local newspaper. At right angles to him half a dozen steamers, moored in a line, with their sterns to the quay and their anchors out forward, were loading with fruit. He looked up from his paper, and his eyes fell upon the nearest ship, which was showing him her starboard broadside. He looked first of all carelessly, then with interest, finally he laid his paper down and walked forward. The boat had received on the lower part of her hull, up to the Plimsoll line, a brilliant fresh coat of red paint. So far, of course, there was nothing unusual, but forward, halfway between her bows and her midships, and again aft on her quarter, she had a broad perpendicular line of the same red paint standing out vividly from the black of her upper plates. Strange called to his engineer, John Shawe, and pointed to the streaks.

"What do you make of them?" he asked.

Shawe shrugged his shoulders.

"Very wasteful it do seem, sir," he said; and to a casual glance it did indeed appear as if the paint had been allowed, through some carelessness on deck, to drip down the side at those two points. Strange, however, was not satisfied. The bands of scarlet were too

regular, too broad. He had himself rowed out in his dinghy past the steamer's bows.

"That will do, Harry," he said. "We can go back."

On the port bows and quarter of the steamer he had seen the same vivid streaks. Strange spoke again to John Shawe.

"Waste isn't the explanation, that's sure. You go about the town a bit, don't you? You know some of the men about the port. You might find out for me—quietly, you know—what you can about that boat"; and the phrase "quietly, you know," made all at once a different man of John Shawe. Strange at this time was really more moved by curiosity than suspicion, but he did use the phrase, and John Shawe, a big, simple, south countryman, who knew his engine and very little else, swelled at once into a being of mystery, full of brow-twisting wisdom and portentously sly.

"I understand, sir," he said in a knowing whisper. "I know my dooty. It shall be done." He put on his best brass-buttoned coat that evening, and went down the three steps of the gangway ladder with a secret air, a sleuth; but he brought back his news nevertheless.

"All those boats, sir, are chartered by a German here named Rehnke."

"But some of them are English. They are flying the red flag," cried Strange in revolt.

"It's God's truth, sir, and here's more of it. Every one of them's bound for England, consigned to English firms. One's for Manchester, two for Cardiff, one for Liverpool."

"But it's impossible. It's trading with the enemy," Strange exclaimed.

"That don't apply to the enemy in neutral countries, they say. Oh, there's a deal of dirty work going on in England. Will you come on deck?"

Strange nodded. The saloon door opened into the cockpit, and the cabin roof was the deck of the after-part of the *Boulotte*. They climbed by a little ladder out of the cockpit. It was twelve o'clock on a night of full moon.

"Look, sir," said Shawe.

The English boat had sailed that afternoon. The starboard side of its neighbour was now revealed. Strange looked through his glasses and he saw. Over the bows of that tramp steamer at midnight a man was suspended on a plank, and he was painting a broad, perpendicular, red streak.

Strange thought over his discovery lying on his back in the saloon. Distinguishing marks on a row of ships chartered by a German—there was just one explanation for them! Strange did not even whisper it to John Shawe, but he went ashore the next morning and called upon the British Consul.

His card was taken into a room where two men were speaking. At once the conversation stopped, and it was not resumed. There was not a whisper, nor the sound of any movement. Strange had a picture in his mind of two men with their heads together staring at his card and exchanging an unspoken question. Then the clerk appeared again.

"Mr. Taylor will see you with pleasure," he said.

As Strange entered the room a slim, elderly, indifferent gentleman, seated at a knee-hole table, gazed vaguely at him through his spectacles and offered him a chair.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Strange?" he asked, and since Strange hesitated, he turned towards his companion.

"This is Major Slingsby," said the Consul. "He will not be in your way."

Major Slingsby, a square, short, rubicund man of forty, with the face of a faun, bowed, and, without moving from his chair, seemed, nevertheless, to remove himself completely from the room.

"Not at all," said Strange. He had not an idea that he was in the presence of the two shrewdest men in those parts. To him they were just a couple of languid people whom it was his duty to arouse, and he told his story as vividly as he could.

"And what do you deduce from these mysterious signs?" asked the Consul.

Strange's answer was prompt.

"German submarines in the Mediterranean."

"Oh! And why not the Channel?" asked Mr. Taylor. "These steamers are on their way there."

To that question there was no reply. Strange rose. "I thought that I ought to tell you what I had noticed," he said stiffly.

"Thank you, yes. And I am very grateful," replied Taylor.

Major Slingsby, however, followed Strange out of the room.

"Will you lunch with me?" he asked, and the question sent the blood rushing into Strange's face. He swung between his instinct to hide his head from any man who was doing service and his craving to converse with a fellow-countryman. The craving won.

"I shall be very pleased," he stammered.

"Right. It is half-past twelve now. Shall we say one at the Café de Rome?"

As they sat against the wall by the window of the café Slingsby talked of ordinary matters, which any one of those in the chairs outside upon the pavement might overhear and be none the wiser. But he talked sagely, neither parading mysteries nor pretending disclosures. He let the mere facts of companionship and nationality work, and before luncheon was over Strange was won by them. He longed to confide, to justify himself before a fellow-citizen of his miserable inertness. Over the coffee, indeed, he would have begun, but Slingsby saw the torrent of confession coming.

"Do you often lunch here?" he said quickly. "I do whenever I happen to be in the town. Sit in this window for an hour and you will see all the town paraded before you like a show, its big men and little men, its plots and its intrigues. There, for instance," and he nodded towards a large, stout person with a blonde moustache, "is Rehnke—yes, that's your man. Take a good look at him."

Strange looked at the German hard. He looked also towards a youth who had been sitting for the last hour over a cup of coffee and a newspaper outside the window. Slingsby interpreted the look.

"He's all right. He's trying to listen, of course. Most foreigners do, whether they understand your language or not. And he doesn't—not a word of it. I have been watching him. However, we may as well go, for I would very much like you to show me your little boat."

Strange, eager and enthusiastic, jumped up from the table.

"Rather," he cried. "She's not big, of course, but she can keep the sea, especially since I strengthened her bows."

"Oh, you have done that, have you?" said Slingsby, as he paid the bill. "That's interesting."

They crossed the boulevard to the quay and went on board the *Boulotte*. Every inch of brass on her, from the stanchions round the deck to the engine-room telegraph, flashed, and she was varnished and white and trim like a lady fresh from her maid.

"What can you do with your forced draught?" asked Slingsby.

"Thirteen," replied Strange proudly. "With a good wind astern fourteen. Once I went out past the Needles buoy"—and off he went in a glowing account of a passage to Cherbourg at the end of a stormy September. Slingsby never once interrupted him. He followed meekly from the rudder to the bow, where he examined with some attention the famous struts and cross-pieces.

"You have got a wireless, I see," he said, looking up to the aerial, which, slackened and disconnected, dangled from the masthead.

"Yes. But it's a small affair. However, I can hear four hundred miles if the night's still. I can only send seventy."

Slingsby nodded, and the two men returned to the saloon. There, at last, over a whisky and soda, Strange was encouraged to unload his soul. The torture of the August night's on the Berkshire Downs above the Thames Valley; the intolerable sense of uselessness; the feeling that he wore a brand of shame upon his forehead for all men to see, and the poignancy of the

remorse which had shrivelled him when a wounded soldier from Ypres or Le Cateau limped past him in the street ; all tumbled from his lips in abrupt, half-finished sentences.

"Therefore I ran away," he said.

Slingsby sat back in his chair.

"So that's it," he said, and he laughed in a friendly fashion. "Do you know that we have all been greatly worried about you ? Oh, you have caused a deuce of a fluttering, I can tell you."

Strange flushed scarlet.

"I was suspected !" he cried. "Good God !" It just wanted that to complete his utter shame. He had been worse than useless ; he had given trouble. He sat with his eyes fixed, in the depths of abasement. Then other words were spoken to him :

"How long will it take you to bring your boat to Marseilles ?"

"You want it, then ?" said Strange.

"I can use you," said Slingsby. "What's more, you are necessary."

Strange, with a buzzing head, got out his chart from a locker and spread it on the table. He took paper and a lead pencil and his compasses. He marked his course and measured it.

"Forty-seven hours' steaming and six hours to get up steam. It's four o'clock now, and the day's Tuesday. I can be at Marseilles on Thursday afternoon at four."

"I have done a good day's work," said Major Slingsby, as he rose to his feet, and he meant it. Slingsby was an intelligence officer as well as an officer of intelligence, and since he had neither boats to dispose

of nor money to buy them with, Anthony Strange was a godsend to him. "But I don't want you until to-day week. I shall want a little time to make arrangements with the French."

The *Boulotte* steamed round the point at three o'clock on the appointed afternoon. The pilot took her through the Naval Harbour into the small basin where the destroyers lie, and by half-past she was berthed against the quay. Strange had been for the best part of two days on his bridge, but at eleven he was knocking at a certain door without any inscription upon it in the Port office, and he was admitted to a new Major Slingsby in a khaki uniform, with red tabs on the collar, and clerks typewriting for dear life in a tiny room.

"Hallo," said Slingsby. He looked into a letter-tray on the edge of his desk and took a long envelope from it and handed it to Strange. "You might have a look at this. I'll come on board to-morrow morning. Meanwhile, if I were you I should go to bed, though I doubt if you'll get much sleep."

The reason for that doubt became more and more apparent as the evening wore on. In the first place, when Strange returned, he found workmen with drills and hammers and rivets spoiling the white foredeck of his adored *Boulotte*. For a moment he was inclined, like Captain Hatteras when his crew cut down his bulwarks for firewood, to stand aside and weep, but he went forward, and when he saw the work which was going on his heart exulted. Then he went back to the saloon, but as he stretched himself out upon the cushions he remembered the envelope in his pocket. It was stamped "On His Majesty's Service," and it contained the announcement that one Anthony Strange had been

granted a commission as sub-lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. After that sleep was altogether out of the question. There was the paper to be re-read at regular intervals lest its meaning should have been misunderstood. And when its meaning was at last firmly and joyfully fixed in Strange's mind there was the paper itself to be guarded and continually felt, lest it should lose itself, be stolen, or evaporate into air. Towards midnight, indeed, he did begin to doze off, but then a lighter came alongside and dumped ten tons of Welsh steam coal on board, all that he could hold, it's true, but that gave him ten days' steaming at ordinary draught. And at eight o'clock to the minute Slingsby hailed him from the quay.

"You will go back now to your old harbour," he said. "You have been a little cruise down the coast, that's all. Just look out for a sailing schooner called the *Santa Maria del Pilar*. She ought to turn up in seven days from now to take on board a good many barrels of carbonate of soda. I'll come by train at the same time. If she arrives before and takes her cargo on board, you can wire to me through the Consul and then—act on your own discretion."

Strange drew a long breath, and his eyes shone.

"But she won't, I think," said Slingsby. "By the way, you were at Rugby with Russell of my regiment, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"And you know Cowper, who was admiral out here?"

"Yes, he's my uncle."

"Exactly."

Strange smiled. It was clear that a good many

inquiries must have been made about him over the telegraph wires during the last week.

"Well, that's all, I think," said Slingsby. "You'll push off as soon as you can, and good luck."

But there was one further ceremony before the *Bonlotte* was ready for sea. The small crew was signed on under the Naval Discipline Act. Then she put out, rounded the point, and headed for her destination over a smooth, sunlit sea, with, by the way, an extra hand on board and a fine new capstan on her foredeck. Two days later she was moored in her old position, and Strange went to bed. The excitement was over, a black depression bore him down; he was deadly tired, and his back hurt him exceedingly. What was he doing at all with work of this kind? If he had to "act on his own discretion," could he do it with any sort of profit? Such questions plagued him for two days more, whilst he lay and suffered. But then relief came. He slept soundly and without pain, and rose the next morning in a terror lest the *Santa Maria del Pilar* should have come and gone. He went up on to the deck and searched the harbour with his glasses. There was but one sailing boat taking in cargo, and she a brigantine named the *Richard*, with the Norwegian flag painted on her sides. Strange hurried to the Consul, and returned with a mind at ease. The *Santa Maria del Pilar* had not yet sailed in between the moles. Nor did she come until the next afternoon, by which time Slingsby was on board the *Bonlotte*.

"There she is," said Strange in a whisper of excitement, looking seawards. She sailed in with the sunset and a fair wind, a white schooner like a great golden bird of the sea, and she was nursed by a tug into a berth

on the opposite side of the harbour. Slingsby and Strange dined at the Café de Rome and came on board again at nine. The great globes of electric light on their high pillars about the quays shone down upon the still, black water of the harbour. It was very quiet. From the cockpit of the *Boulotte* the two men looked across to the schooner.

"I think there's a lighter alongside of her, isn't there?" said Slingsby.

Strange, whose eyesight was remarkable, answered:

"Yes, a lighter loaded with barrels."

"Some carbonate of soda," said Slingsby, with a grin. They went into the cockpit, leaving the door open.

It was a hot night, and in a café beyond the trees a band was playing the compelling music of *Louise*. Strange listened to it, deeply stirred. Life had so changed for him that he had risen from the depths during the last weeks. Then Slingsby raised his hand.

"Listen!"

With the distant music there mingled now the creaking of a winch. Strange extinguished the light, and both men crept out from the cockpit. The sound came from the *Santa Maria del Pilar*, and they could see the spar of her hoisting tackle swing out over the lighter and inboard over the ship's deck.

"She's loading," said Strange, in a low voice.

"Yes," answered Slingsby; "she's loading." And his voice purred like a contented cat.

He slept on a bed made up in the saloon that night, Strange in his tiny cabin, and at nine o'clock the next morning, as they sat at breakfast, they saw the *Santa Maria del Pilar* make for the sea.

"We ought to follow, oughtn't we?" said Strange anxiously.

"There's no hurry."

"But she'll do nine knots in this breeze." Strange watched her with the eye of knowledge as she leaned over ever so slightly from the wind. "She might give us the slip."

Slingsby went on eating unconcernedly.

"She will," he answered. "We are not after her, my friend. Got your chart?"

Strange fetched it from the locker and spread it out on the table.

"Do you see a small island with a lighthouse?"

"Yes."

"Four miles west-south-west of the lighthouse. Got it?"

"Yes."

"How long will it take you to get to that point?"

Strange measured his course.

"Five to five and a half hours' forced draught."

"Good. Suppose we start at six this evening."

The *Boulotte* went away to the minute. At eight it began to grow dark, but no steaming light was hoisted on the mast, and no side-lamps betrayed her presence. In the failing light she became one with the sea but for the tiniest wisp of smoke from her chimney, and soon the night hid that. A lantern flashed for a while here and there on the forward deck in the centre of a little group, and then Slingsby came back to Strange at the wheel.

"It's all right," he whispered softly.

Nights at sea! The cool, dark tent of stars, the hiss

and tinkle of waves against the boat's side, the dinghy, slung out upon the davits, progressing above the surface of the water, the lamp light from the compass striking up on the brasswork of the wheel and the face of the steersman ; to nights at sea Strange owed all the spacious moments of his crippled life. But this night was a sacred thing. He was admitted to the band of the young strong men who serve, like a novice into the communion of a church ; and his heart sang within his breast as he kept the *Boulotte* to her course. At a quarter past eleven he rang the telegraph and put the indicator to "slow." Five minutes later he stopped the engine altogether. Four miles away to the north-eastward a light brightened and faded.

"We are there," he said, and he looked out over an empty sea.

Under Slingsby's orders he steamed slowly round in a circle, ever increasing the circumference, for an hour, and then the new hand—who, by the way, was a master gunner—crept aft.

"There it is, sir."

A hundred yards from the port bow a dark mass floated on the sea. The *Boulotte* slid gently alongside of it. It was a raft made of barrels lashed together.

"We have seen those barrels before, my friend," said Slingsby, his nose wrinkling up in a grin of delight. Before daybreak the work was done. Fifty empty barrels floated loose ; there was a layer of heavy oil over the sea and a rank smell in the air.

"Now," said Slingsby, in a whisper, "shall we have any luck, I wonder?"

He went forward. The capstan head had been re-

moved, and in its place sat a neat little automatic gun, which could fling two hundred and seventy three-pound shells six thousand yards in a minute. For the rest of that night the *Boulotte* lay motionless without a light showing or a word spoken. And just as the morning came, in the very first unearthly grey of it, a wave broke—a long, placid roller which had no right to break in that smooth, deep sea. Slingsby dipped his hand into the cartridge box and made sure that the band ran free; the gunner stood with one hand on the elevating wheel, the other on the trigger; eight hundred yards away from the *Boulotte* there was a wild commotion of the water, and black against the misty grey a conning tower and a long, low body of steel rose into view. U-whatever-its-number was taken by surprise. The whole affair lasted a few seconds. With his third shot the gunner found the range, and then, planting his shells with precision in a level line like the perforations of a postage stamp, he ripped the submarine from amidships to its nose. Strange had a vision for a second of a couple of men trying to climb out from the conning tower, and then the nose went up in the air like the snout of some monstrous fish, and the sea gulped it down.

“One of ’em,” said Slingsby. “But we won’t mention it. Lucky you saw those red streaks, my friend. If a destroyer had come prowling up this coast instead of the harmless little *Boulotte* there wouldn’t have been any raft on the sea or any submarine just here under the sea. What about breakfast?”

Strange set the boat’s course for Marseilles, and the rest of that voyage was remarkable only for a clear

illustration of the difference between the amateur and the professional. For whereas Strange could not for the life of him keep still during one minute, Slingsby, stretched at his ease on the saloon sofa, beguiled the time with quotations from the "Bab Ballads" and "Departmental Ditties."

From "The Four Corners of the World."

VI

THE MAN WHO HATED EARTHWORMS

EDGAR WALLACE

“THE death has occurred at Staines of Mr. Falmouth, late Superintendent of the Criminal Investigation Department. Mr. Falmouth will best be remembered as the Officer who arrested George Manfred, the leader of the Four Just Men Gang. The sensational escape of this notorious man is perhaps the most remarkable chapter in criminal history. The ‘Four Just Men’ was an organisation which set itself to right acts of injustice which the law left unpunished. It is believed that the members were exceedingly rich men who devoted their lives and fortunes to this quixotic but wholly unlawful purpose. The gang has not been heard of for many years.”

Manfred read the paragraph from the “Morning Telegram” and Leon Gonzalez frowned.

“I have an absurd objection to being called a ‘gang,’” he said, and Manfred smiled quietly.

“Poor old Falmouth,” he reflected, “well he knows! He was a nice fellow.”

“I liked Falmouth,” agreed Gonzalez. “He was a perfectly normal man except for a slight progenism.”

Manfred laughed.

“Forgive me if I appear dense, but I have never been able to keep up with you in this particular branch of science,” he said. “What is a ‘progenism’?”

“The unscientific call it an ‘underhung jaw,’” ex-

plained Leon, "and it is mistaken for strength. It is only normal in Piedmont where the Brachy-cephalic skull is so common. With such a skull, progenism is almost a natural condition."

"Progenism or not, he was a good fellow," insisted Manfred, and Leon nodded. "With well-developed wisdom teeth," he added slyly, and Gonzalez went red, for teeth formed a delicate subject with him. Nevertheless he grinned.

"It will interest you to know, my dear George," he said triumphantly, "that when the famous Dr. Carrara examined the teeth of four hundred criminals and a like number of non-criminals—you will find his detailed narrative in the monograph 'Sullo Sviluppo Del Terzo Dente Morale Nei Criminali'—he found the wisdom tooth more frequently present in normal people."

"I grant you the wisdom tooth," said Manfred hastily. "Look at the bay! Did you ever see anything more perfect?"

They were sitting on a little green lawn overlooking Babbacombe Beach. The sun was going down and a perfect day was drawing to its golden close. High above the blue sea towered the crimson cliffs and green fields of Devon.

Manfred looked at his watch.

"Are we dressing for dinner?" he asked, "or has your professorial friend Bohemian tastes?"

"He is of the new school," said Leon, "rather superior, rather immaculate, very Balliol. I am anxious that you should meet him: his hands are rather fascinating."

Manfred in his wisdom did not ask why.

"I met him at golf," Gonzalez went on, "and certain

things happened which interested me. For example, every time he saw an earthworm he stopped to kill it and displayed such an extraordinary fury in the assassination that I was astounded. Prejudice has no place in the scientific mind. He is exceptionally wealthy. People at the club told me that his uncle left him close on a million, and the estate of his aunt or cousin who died last year was valued at another million, and he was the sole legatee. Naturally a good catch. Whether Miss Molenœux thinks the same I have had no opportunity of gauging," he added, after a pause.

"Good lord!" cried Manfred in consternation as he jumped up from his chair. "She is coming to dinner too, isn't she?"

"And her mamma," said Leon soberly. "Her mamma has learnt Spanish by Correspondence Lessons and insists upon greeting me with, *Habla usted Español?*"

The two men had rented Cliff House for the spring. Manfred loved Devonshire in April when the slopes of the hills were yellow with primroses and daffodils made a golden path across the Devon lawns. "Señor Fuentes" had taken the house after one inspection and found the calm and the peace which only nature's treasury of colour and fragrance could bring to his active mind.

Manfred had dressed and was sitting by the wood fire in the drawing room when the purr of a motor car coming cautiously down the cliff road brought him to his feet and through the open French window.

Leon Gonzalez had joined him before the big limousine had come to a halt before the porch.

The first to alight was a man and George observed him closely. He was tall and thin. He was not bad-

looking, though the face was lined and the eyes deep-set and level. He greeted Gonsalez with just a tiny hint of patronage in his tone.

"I hope we haven't kept you waiting, but my experiments detained me. Nothing went right in the laboratory to-day. You know Miss Moleneux and Mrs. Moleneux?"

Manfred was introduced and found himself shaking hands with a grave-eyed girl of singular beauty.

Manfred was unusually sensitive to 'atmosphere' and there was something about this girl which momentarily chilled him. Her frequent smile, sweet as it was and undoubtedly sincere, was as undoubtedly mechanical. Leon, who judged people by reason rather than instinct, reached his conclusion more surely and gave shape and definite description to what in Manfred's mind was merely a distressful impression. The girl was afraid! Of what, wondered Leon? Not of that stout complacent little woman whom she called mother, and surely not of this thin-faced academic gentleman in pince-nez.

Gonsalez had introduced Dr. Viglow and whilst the ladies were taking off their cloaks in Manfred's room above, he had leisure to form a judgment. There was no need for him to entertain his guest. Dr. Viglow spoke fluently, entertainingly and all the time.

"Our friend here plays a good game of golf," he said, indicating Gonsalez, "a good game of golf indeed for a foreigner. You two are Spanish?"

Manfred nodded. He was more thoroughly English than the doctor, did that gentleman but know, but it was as a Spaniard and armed, moreover, with a Spanish passport that he was a visitor to Britain.

"I understood you to say that your investigations

have taken rather a sensational turn, doctor," said Leon, and a light came into Dr. Viglow's eyes.

"Yes," he said complacently, and then quickly, "who told you that?"

"You told me yourself at the club the other morning."

The doctor frowned.

"Did I?" he said and he passed his hand across his forehead. "I can't recollect that. When was this?"

"This morning," said Leon, "but your mind was probably occupied with much more important matters."

The young professor bit his lip and frowned thoughtfully.

"I ought not to have forgotten what happened this morning," he said in a troubled tone.

He gave the impression to Manfred that one half of him was struggling desperately to overcome a something in the other half. Suddenly he laughed.

"A sensational turn!" he said. "Yes indeed, and I rather think that within a few months I shall not be without fame, even in my own country! It is of course, terribly expensive. I was only reckoning up to-day that my typists' wages come to nearly £60 a week."

Manfred opened his eyes at this.

"Your typists' wages?" he repeated slowly. "Are you preparing a book?"

"Here are the ladies," said Dr. Felix.

His manner was abrupt to rudeness and later when they sat round the table in the little dining-room Manfred had further cause to wonder at the boorish-

ness of this young scientist. He was seated next to Miss Moleneux and the meal was approaching its end when most unexpectedly he turned to the girl and in a loud voice said :

"You haven't kissed me to-day, Margaret."

The girl went red and white and the fingers that fidgetted with the table-ware before her were trembling when she faltered. ~~without a syllable~~

"Haven't—haven't I, Felix?"

The bright eyes of Gonzalez never left the doctor. The man's face had gone purple with rage.

"By Jove! This is a nice thing!" he almost shouted. "I'm engaged to you. I've left you everything in my will and I'm allowing your mother a thousand a year and you haven't kissed me to-day!"

"Doctor!" it was the mild but insistent voice of Gonzalez that broke the tension. "I wonder whether you would tell me what chemical is represented by the formula Cl_2O_5 ."

The doctor had turned his head slowly at the sound of Leon's voice and now was staring at him. Slowly the strange look passed from his face and it became normal.

" Cl_2O_5 is Oxide of Chlorine," he said in an even voice, and from thenceforward the conversation passed by way of acid re-actions into a scientific channel.

The only person at the table who had not been perturbed by Viglow's outburst had been the dumpy complacent lady on Manfred's right. She had tittered audibly at the reference to her allowance, and when the hum of conversation became general she lowered her voice and leant towards Manfred.

"Dear Felix is so eccentric," she said, "but he is quite the nicest, kindest soul. One must look after one's girls, don't you agree, Señor?"

She asked this latter question in very bad Spanish and Manfred nodded. He shot a glance at the girl. She was still deathly pale.

"And I am perfectly certain she will be happy, much happier than she would have been with that impossible person."

She did not specify who the "impossible person" was, but Manfred sensed a whole world of tragedy. He was not romantic, but one look at the girl had convinced him that there was something wrong in this engagement. Now it was that he came to a conclusion which Leon had reached an hour before, that the emotion which dominated the girl was fear. And he pretty well knew of whom she was afraid.

Half-an-hour later, when the tail-light of Dr. Viglow's limousine had disappeared round a corner of the drive, the two men went back to the drawing-room and Manfred threw a handful of kindling to bring the fire to a blaze.

"Well, what do you think?" said Gonzalez, rubbing his hands together with evidence of some enjoyment.

"I think it's rather horrible," replied Manfred, settling himself in his chair. "I thought the days when wicked mothers forced their daughters into unwholesome marriages were passed and done with. One hears so much about the modern girl."

"Human nature isn't modern," said Gonzalez briskly, "and most mothers are fools where their daughters are concerned. I know you won't agree,

but I speak with authority. Mantegazza collected statistics of 843 families—”

Manfred chuckled.

“You and your Mantegazza!” he laughed. “Did that infernal man know everything?”

“Almost everything,” said Leon. “As to the girl”—he became suddenly grave—“she will not marry him, of course.”

“What is the matter with him?” asked Manfred. “He seems to have an ungovernable temper.”

“He is mad,” replied Leon calmly and Manfred looked at him.

“Mad?” he repeated incredulously. “Do you mean to say that he is a lunatic?”

“I never use the word in a spectacular or even in a vulgar sense,” said Gonzalez, lighting a cigarette carefully. “The man is undoubtedly mad. I thought so a few days ago and I am certain of it now. The most ominous test is the test of memory. People who are on the verge of madness or entering its early stages do not remember what happened a short time before. Did you notice how worried he was when I told him of the conversation we had this morning?”

“That struck me as peculiar,” agreed Manfred.

“He was fighting,” said Leon, “the sane half of his brain against the insane half. The doctor against the irresponsible animal. The doctor told him that if he had suddenly lost his memory for incidents which had occurred only a few hours before, he was on the high way to lunacy. The crazy half of the brain told him that he was such a wonderful fellow that the rules applying to ordinary human beings did not apply to him. We will call upon him to-morrow to see his

laboratory and discover why he is paying £60 a week for typists," he said. "And now, my dear George, you can go to bed. I am going to read the excellent but often misguided Lombroso on the male delinquent."

Dr. Viglow's laboratory was a new red building on the edge of Dartmoor. To be exact, it consisted of two buildings, one of which was a large army hut which had been recently erected for the accommodation of the doctor's clerical staff.

"I haven't met a professor for two or three years," said Manfred as they were driving across the moor, en route to pay their call, "nor have I been in a laboratory for five. And yet within the space of a few weeks I have met two extraordinary professors, one of whom I admit was dead. Also I have visited two laboratories."

Leon nodded.

"Some day I will make a very complete examination of the phenomena of coincidence," he said.

When they reached the laboratory they found a post office van, backed up against the main entrance, and three assistants in white overalls were carrying post bags and depositing them in the van.

"He must have a pretty large correspondence," said Manfred in wonder.

The doctor, in a long white overall, was standing at the door as they alighted from their car and greeted them warmly.

"Come into my office," he said, and led the way to a large airy room which was singularly free from the paraphernalia which Gonzalez usually associated with such work-rooms.

"You have a heavy post," said Leon and the doctor laughed quietly.

"They are merely going to the Torquay post office," he said. "I have arranged for them to be despatched when—" he hesitated, "when I am sure. You see," he said speaking with great earnestness, "a scientist has to be so careful. Every minute after he has announced a discovery he is tortured with the fear that he has forgotten something, some essential, or has reached a too hasty conclusion. But I think I'm right," he said, speaking half to himself. "I'm sure I'm right, but I must be even more sure!"

He showed them round the large room, but there was little which Manfred had not seen in the laboratory of the late Professor Tableman. Viglow had greeted them genially, indeed expansively, and yet within five minutes of their arrival he was taciturn, almost silent, and did not volunteer information about any of the instruments in which Leon showed so much interest, unless he was asked.

They came back to his room and again his mood changed and he became almost gay.

"I'll tell you," he said, "by Jove, I'll tell you! And no living soul knows this except myself, or realises or understands the extraordinary work I have been doing."

His face lit up, his eyes sparkled and it seemed to Manfred that he grew taller in this moment of exaltation. Pulling open a drawer of a table which stood against the wall he brought out a long porcelain plate and laid it down. From a wire-netted cupboard on the wall he took two tin boxes and with an expression of disgust which he could not disguise, turned the contents upon the slab. It was apparently a box full of common garden mould and then Leon saw to his amazement a

wriggling little red shape twisting and twining in its acute discomfort. The little red fellow sought to hide himself and burrowed sinuously into the mould.

"Curse you! Curse you!" The doctor's voice rose until it was a howl. His face was twisted and puckered in his mad rage. "How I hate you!"

If ever a man's eyes held hate and terror, they were the eyes of Dr. Felix Viglow.

Manfred drew a long breath and stepped back a pace the better to observe him. Then the man calmed himself and peered down at Leon.

"When I was a child," he said in a voice that shook, "I hated them and we had a nurse named Martha, a beastly woman, a wicked woman, who dropped one down my neck. Imagine the horror of it!"

Leon said nothing. To him the earthworm was a genus of *chaetopod* in the section *oligochaeta* and bore the somewhat pretentious name of *lumbricus terrestris*. And in that way, Dr. Viglow, eminent naturalist and scientist, should have regarded this beneficent little fellow.

"I have a theory," said the doctor (he was calmer now and was wiping the sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief), "that in cycles every type of living thing on the earth becomes in turn the dominant creature. In a million years' time man may dwindle to the size of an ant and the earthworm, by its super-intelligence, its cunning and its ferocity, may be pre-eminent in the world! I have always thought that," he went on when neither Leon nor Manfred offered any comment. "It is still my thought by day and my dream by night. I have devoted my life to the destruction of this menace."

Now the earthworm is neither cunning nor intelligent and is moreover notoriously devoid of ambition.

The doctor again went to the cupboard and took out a wide-necked bottle filled with a greyish powder. He brought it back and held it within a few inches of Leon's face.

"This is the work of twelve years," he said simply. "There is no difficulty in finding a substance which will kill these pests, but this does more."

He took a scalpel and tilting the bottle brought out a few grains of the powder on the edge of a knife. This he dissolved in a twenty-ounce measure which he filled with water. He stirred the colourless fluid with a glass rod, then lifting the rod he allowed three drops to fall upon the mould wherein the little reptile was concealed. A few seconds passed, there was a heaving of the earth where the victim was concealed.

"He is dead," said the doctor triumphantly and scraped away the earth to prove the truth of his words. "And he is not only dead, but that handful of earth is death to any other earthworm that touches it."

He rang a bell and one of his attendants came in.

"Clear away that," he said with a shudder and walked gloomily to his desk.

Leon did not speak all the way back to the house. He sat curled up in the corner of the car, his arms tightly folded, his chin on his breast. That night without a word of explanation he left the house, declining Manfred's suggestion that he should walk with him and volunteering no information as to where he was going.

Gonsalez walked by the cliff road, across Babbacombe Downs and came to the doctor's house at nine o'clock

that night. The doctor had a large house and maintained a big staff of servants, but amongst his other eccentricities was the choice of a gardener's cottage away from the house as his sleeping place at night.

It was only lately that the doctor had chosen this lonely lodging. He had been happy enough in the big old house which had been his father's, until he had heard voices whispering to him at night and the creak of boards and had seen shapes vanishing along the dark corridors, and then in his madness he had conceived the idea that his servants were conspiring against him and that he might any night be murdered in his bed. So he had the gardener turned out of his cottage, had refurnished the little house, and there behind locked doors he read and thought and slept the nights away. Gonzalez had heard of this peculiarity and approached the cottage with some caution, for a frightened man is more dangerous than a wicked man. He rapped at the door and heard a step across the flagged floor.

"Who is that?" asked a voice.

"It is I," said Gonzalez and gave the name by which he was known.

After hesitation the lock turned and the door opened.

"Come in, come in," said Viglow testily and locked the door behind him. "You have come to congratulate me, I am sure. You must come to my wedding too, my friend. It will be a wonderful wedding, for there I shall make a speech and tell the story of my discovery. Will you have a drink? I have nothing here, but I can get it from the house. I have a telephone in my bedroom."

Leon shook his head.

"I have been rather puzzling out your plan, doctor," he said, accepting the proffered cigarette, "and I have been trying to connect those postal bags which I saw being loaded at the door of your laboratory with the discovery which you revealed this afternoon."

Dr. Viglow's narrow eyes were gleaming with merriment and he leant back in his chair and crossed his legs, like one preparing for a pleasant recital.

"I will tell you," he said. "For months I have been in correspondence with farming associations, both here and on the Continent. I have something of a European reputation," he said, with that extraordinary immodesty which Leon had noticed before. "In fact, I think that my treatment for phylloxera did more to remove the scourge from the vineyards of Europe than any other preparation." *plague*

Leon nodded. He knew this to be the truth.

"So you see my word is accepted in matters dealing with agriculture. But I found after one or two talks with our own stupid farmers that there is no unusual prejudice against destroying—" he did not mention the dreaded name but shivered, "and that of course I had to get round. Now that I am satisfied that my preparation is exact, I can release the packets in the post office. In fact, I was just about to telephone to the postmaster telling him that they could go off—they are all stamped and addressed—when you knocked at the door."

"To whom are they addressed?" asked Leon steadily.

"To various farmers—some fourteen thousand in all in various parts of the country and Europe, and each packet has printed instructions in English, French,

German and Spanish. I had to tell them that it was a new kind of fertiliser or they may not have been as enthusiastic in the furtherance of my experiment as I am."

"And what are they going to do with these packets when they get them?" asked Leon quietly.

"They will dissolve them and spray a certain area of their land—I suggested ploughed land. They need only treat a limited area of earth," he explained. "I think these wretched beasts will carry infection quickly enough. I believe," he leant forward and spoke impressively, "that in six months there will not be one living in Europe or Asia."

"They do not know that the poison is intended to kill—earthworms?" asked Leon.

"No, I've told you," snapped the other. "Wait, I will telephone the postmaster."

He rose quickly to his feet, but Leon was quicker and gripped his arm.

"My dear friend," he said, "you must not do this."

Dr. Viglow tried to withdraw his arm.

"Let me go," he snarled. "Are you one of those devils who are trying to torment me?"

In ordinary circumstances, Leon would have been strong enough to hold the man, but Viglow's strength was extraordinary and Gonzalez found himself thrust back into the chair. Before he could spring up the man had passed through the door and slammed and locked it behind him.

The cottage was on one floor and was divided into two rooms by a wooden partition which Viglow had had erected. Over the door was a fanlight and pulling

the table forward Leon sprang on to the top and with his elbow smashed the flimsy frame.

"Don't touch that telephone," he said sternly. "Do you hear?"

The doctor looked round with a grin.

"You are a friend of those devils!" he said, and his hand was on the receiver when Leon shot him dead.

Manfred came back the next morning from his walk and found Gonsalez pacing the lawn, smoking an extra long cigar.

"My dear Leon," said Manfred as he slipped his arm in the other's, "you did not tell me."

"I thought it best to wait," said Leon.

"I heard quite by accident," Manfred went on. "The story is that a burglar broke into the cottage and shot the doctor when he was telephoning for assistance. All the silverware in the outer room has been stolen. The doctor's watch and pocket-book have disappeared."

"They are at this moment at the bottom of Babba-combe Bay," said Leon. "I went fishing very early this morning before you were awake."

They paced the lawn in silence for a while and then:

"Was it necessary?" asked Manfred.

"Very necessary," said Leon gravely. "You have to realise first of all that although this man was mad, he had discovered not only a poison but an infection."

"But, my dear fellow," smiled Manfred, "was an earthworm worth it?"

"Worth more than his death," said Leon. "There isn't a scientist in the world who does not agree that if the earthworm was destroyed the world would become

sterile and the people of this world would be starving in seven years."

Manfred stopped in his walk and stared down at his companion.

"Do you really mean that?"

Leon nodded.

"He is the one necessary creature in God's world," he said soberly. "It fertilizes the land and covers the bare rocks with earth. It is the surest friend of mankind that we know, and now I am going down to the post office with a story which I think will be sufficiently plausible to recover those worm poisoners."

Manfred mused a while, then he said:

"I'm glad in many ways—in every way," he corrected. "I rather liked that girl, and I'm sure that impossible person isn't so impossible."

From "The Law of the Four Just Men."

